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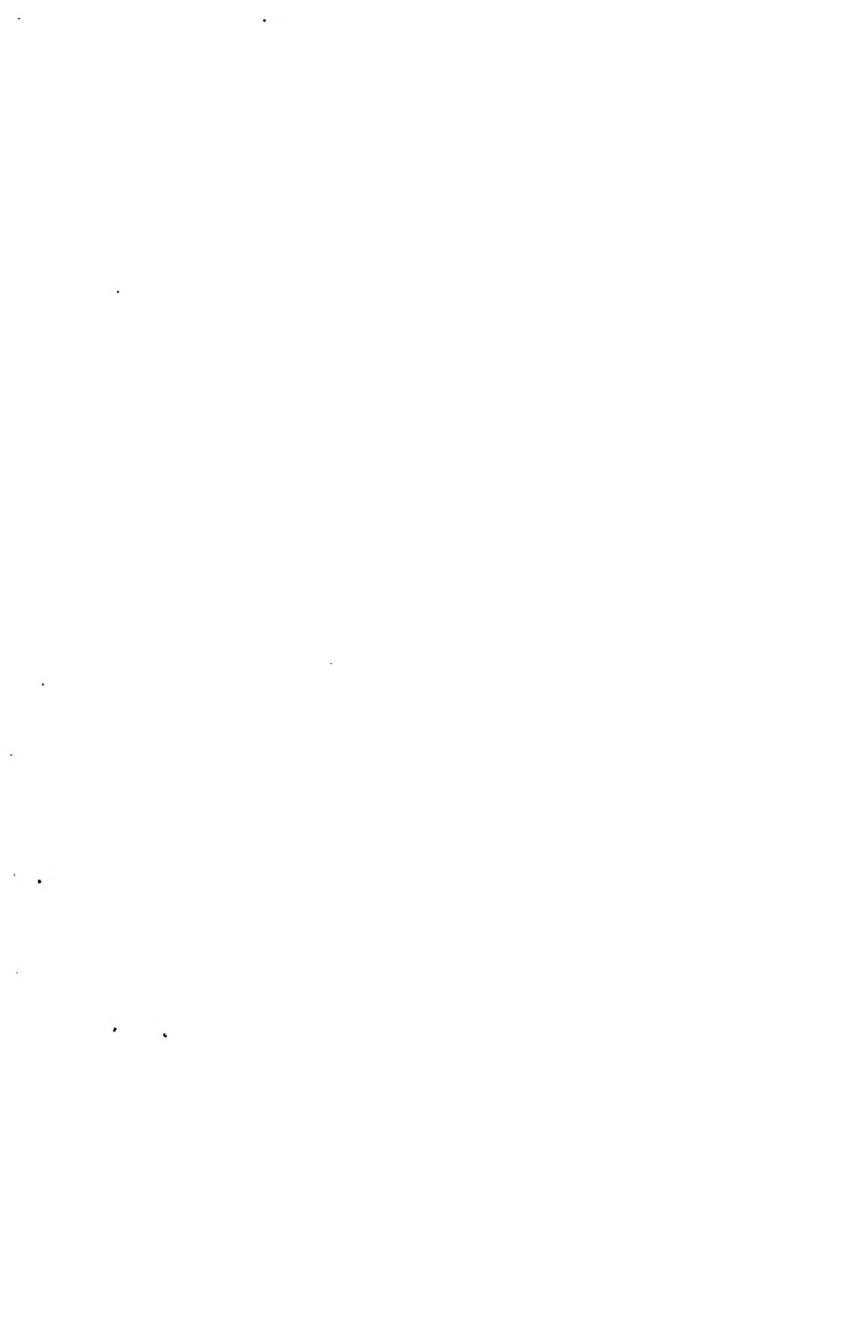
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# THE PERSIANS

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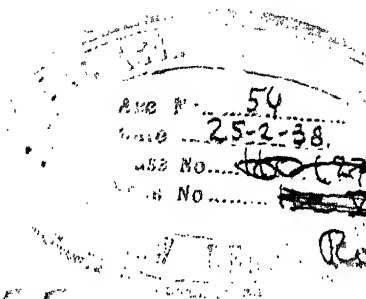


Inside the Mosque of Shāh Abbās at Isfahān. The chair near the doorway is where the officiating Mullah preaches and prays

# THE PERSIANS

By SIR E. DENISON ROSS

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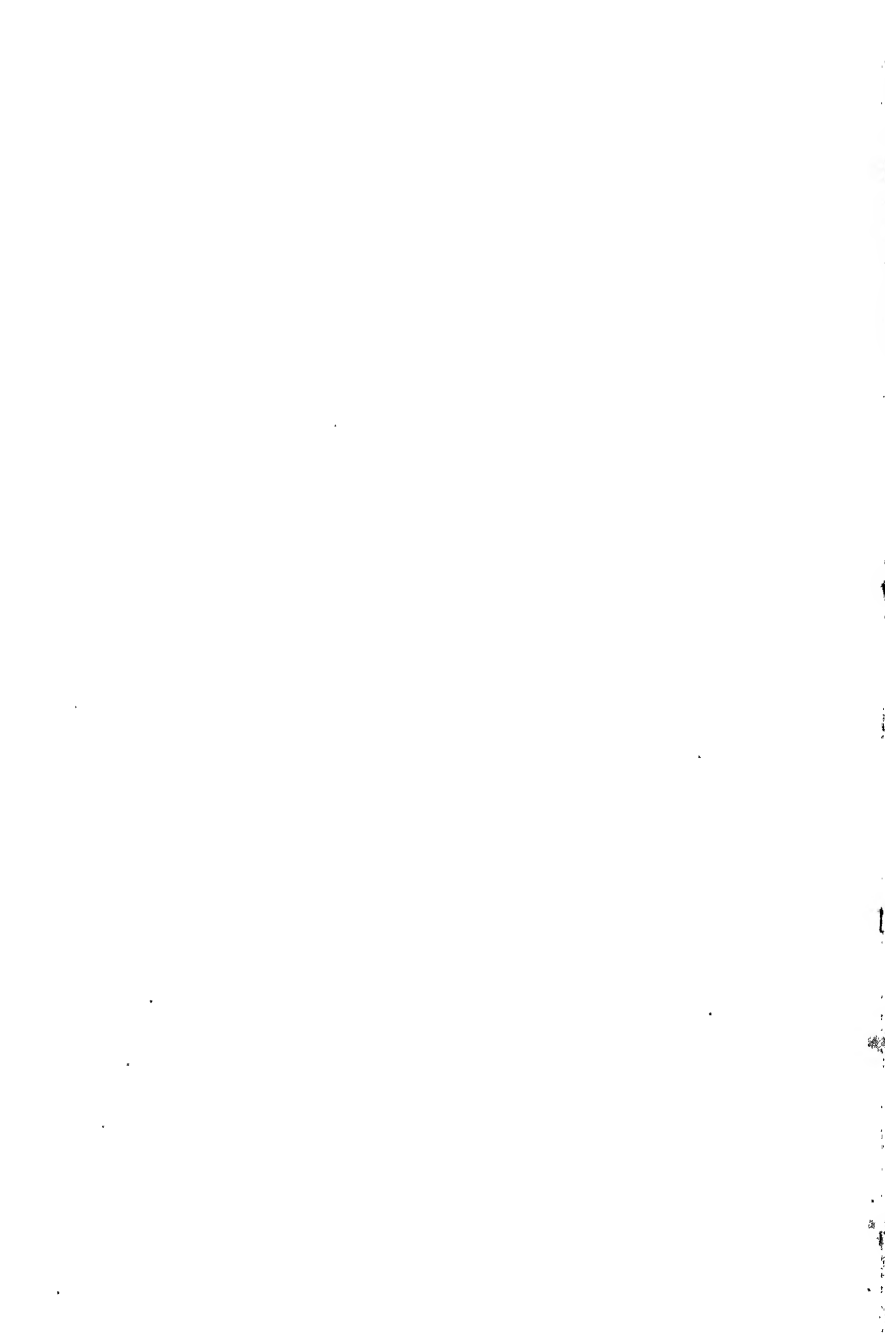
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To

S. M. B.

*whose willing help  
alone made possible  
the appearance of  
this little  
book*



## PREFACE

THE lack of a short comprehensive work on Persia in all its aspects, geographical, historical, artistic, and literary, has long been felt, but the immediate occasion for the appearance of this little book is the forthcoming International Exhibition of Persian Art to be held in London in 1931. In 1892 Lord Curzon published the first and only 'full-length and life-size portrait of Persia', and although he devoted much space to the discussion of political problems and speculations which are to-day quite out of date, the greater part of this masterpiece contains such well-informed and illuminating descriptions of the country, its people, and its monuments, that even after a lapse of forty years it still remains the indispensable guide for the traveller, and the best work of reference for the student: and this in spite of the fact that the intervening period has witnessed a revolution, the establishment of a constitution, a change of dynasty, and a total transformation of the means of transport by the building of motor roads between all the principal towns. In the field of archaeology enormous additions to our knowledge of Persian history and to our understanding

of the ancient monuments have been made, notably by de Morgan, Sarre, and Herzfeld, and several problems to which Lord Curzon devoted much space have been finally disposed of—such, for example, as the identification of Pasargadae. Curzon's *Persia* has, unfortunately, been long out of print, and its second-hand price is almost prohibitive.

Among the travellers who have shown the most sympathetic understanding of the Persians must be mentioned Morier, Polak, Gobineau, Madame Diculafoy, and last, but not least, Edward G. Browne.

The task I set myself in preparing this little book was not to produce an up-to-date abridgement of Lord Curzon's work, or to write an exhaustive history of Persia and her civilization, but rather to make Persia more of a reality to the general reader, and to give him that familiarity with its history and geography which will enable him to think of Persia, not as some strange remote land, but as one as real and living as any country nearer home.

With regard to spelling, I have indicated throughout whether the vowels are to be read as short or long, except in the case of the final *i*, which

is always long. The letter 'ayn is not indicated at the beginning of a word, though it is shown by a ' when it occurs in the middle and at the end of a word: e. g. *Abbās* not 'Abbās; but *Sa'di*. I have considered it unsuitable in a purely popular work to distinguish by special signs the various *t*'s, *s*'s, and *z*'s in words of Arabic origin.

My thanks are due to Mr. Laurence Lockhart for allowing me to use the photographs reproduced in the Frontispiece and facing pages 20, 28, 36, 62, 74, 92, and 96, and also to Professor Dr. Friedrich Sarre for the illustration of the Emperor Valerian kneeling before Shāpur I.

E. D. R.





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# I

## *THE COUNTRY AND THE PEOPLE*

**T**HE country which we call Persia and which the Persians themselves call Irān is an independent kingdom extending from the Caspian Sea in the north to the Indian Ocean in the south, and from Afghanistan and Russian Turkestan in the east to Mesopotamia, Kurdistan, and Armenia.

During her long history, extending over 2,500 years, Persia has always preserved her frontiers more or less unchanged, and she even emerged from the Great War without loss of territory or status. During certain periods, notably after Alexander the Great's conquest, and for more than two hundred years after the invasion of the country by the arms of Islam, Persia lost her position as an independent empire, and during the remaining periods of her history, though she has often formed merely one of several states in the dominions of some world-conqueror, she has always retained her national individuality.

In order to understand the position of comparative isolation which Persia has always enjoyed we must form a general picture of her physical features. In her inaccessibility on all sides she may be compared to Tibet, although her mountain ranges are neither so forbidding nor so all-en-

circling as those of the latter country. The manner in which Persia is shut off from the outer world by natural obstacles is evident if we realize that the high road, for example, between Baghdad and Tehrān, involves the crossing of three great passes between eight and ten thousand feet high. The approach from Asia Minor on the north-west also includes the crossing of high mountains, while between the Caspian and Tehrān lies the Elburz range. On the north-east and east lie waterless deserts. The coast-line between India and the Persian Gulf has so bad a climate as to be almost uninhabitable, while the climate of the Persian Gulf, which cuts into the south-west corner of the country somewhat like the slit in a painter's palette, is very little better.

It is the inaccessibility of this ancient country which, among other circumstances, accounts for the fact that Persia has remained practically intact within her borders since the days of the Medes and Persians. To her isolation, also, is no doubt in great measure due the preservation of her peculiar national characteristics, and of her national independence. Down to the beginning of the nineteenth century it may be said that the danger to her frontiers lay on the east from the nomad tribes who were constantly emigrating from Central Asia, and on the west from the more civilized races, the



A nomad encampment in a high mountain valley



Assyrians, the Greeks, the Romans, and the Ottoman Turks. For the last hundred years the needle of the political compass has turned rather in the directions of the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf.

Persia has, on the whole, a good climate and much fertile territory, though she is a land without any big rivers. Such streams as she possesses are apt to discharge themselves into the desert, or to dry up in the summer, and only one of them, namely, the Kārūn, is navigable. It is curious that a country which has so few natural facilities for the transport of trade should be one of the last to build railways.

Because of its geographical position, Persia has played the part of intermediary in the trade between China and the West; for when the caravans from China began to bring silk to the West they passed along the road leading through Chinese and Russian Turkestan into Persia's rich eastern province of Khurāsān, and thus the Persians became the best customers for silk, which, when they had taken enough for their own needs, they would forward to the West, adding enormously to its cost in other countries by the imposition of high transit duties.

No census has ever been taken of the Persian people. The most recent estimates of her population vary between ten and twelve million souls. Many towns, some of which no longer exist to-day,

have enjoyed in turn the distinction of being the capital of Persia, and with a change of capital there has always been a great shifting of the population. Tehrān, the present capital, whose walls now measure eleven miles in circumference, has a population of 300,000, but was down to 1795 a comparatively insignificant town. The next largest town is Isfahān with a population of 122,000; Shīrāz, Kermānshāh, Kāshān, Tabrīz, and Dizfūl all have about 50,000 inhabitants. There are some forty other towns in Persia with a population of 10,000 and over. About one-quarter of the inhabitants of Persia belong to various nomadic tribes who migrate twice a year between their summer and winter quarters.

Communications in Persia have been entirely revolutionized since the War, and to-day motor roads exist between all the principal towns. The distances between town and town are usually very considerable, and a peculiar feature of Persia is that her cities have no outskirts, but all lie within walls with gateways, so that the traveller comes upon his destination unexpectedly, without the usual warning of scattered farmsteads or villas such as he would find in Europe. In most parts everything between the towns is wilderness—Nature in her natural state untouched by Man. If towns are few and far between, and villages rare, the roads

along which one travels are usually full of life, for there is no end to the caravans of four-wheeled carts, camels, mules, and donkeys which one meets at every turn in long processions proceeding in either direction. It is especially in the narrow gorges of high passes that one is apt to encounter the greatest congestion of traffic. These caravans are in charge of men totally oblivious of time and indifferent to comfort. Two miles an hour is good enough for most of them, and usually more than many of the poor weary horses or mules can manage with heavy burdens on steep snowy roads. Travelling in the old days, except for the man in a hurry, was far pleasanter. There were no carts, and even on the worst mountain paths it was usually possible for a rider to pass a caravan without disaster. One either travelled slowly by caravan, or by *chapar*, like the Persian Mail Carriers, as fast as one's relay horse would carry one. This mode of travel, whether slow or fast, had the great advantage that it allowed one to halt for rest, and to survey the scenery. Travelling nowadays by car entails an early start in order to reach the next town before nightfall. There is little or no chance of breaking the journey except here and there for food in a wayside *chāikhāna*. The Persians used to say: 'The Europeans would not need roads if they had horses as good as ours.'



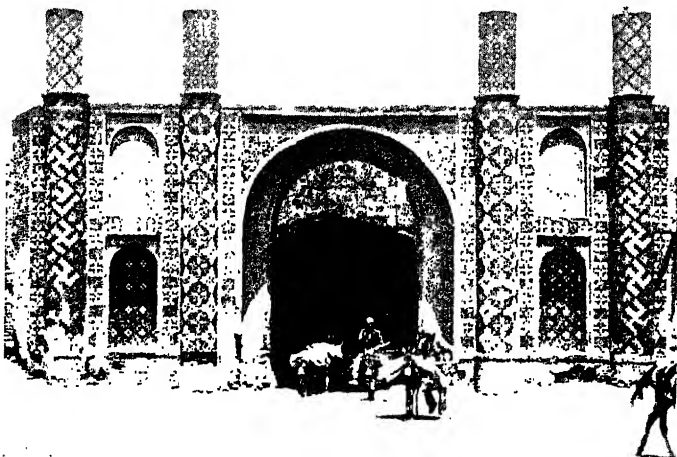
The scenery of Persia is unique. The colours which her mountains take on beggar all description; and whether near or from afar, in the full glare of midday or at the rising and setting of the sun, they offer a spectacle that can never be forgotten. One climbs a winding road for hours to reach the top of a pass, only to see another formidable range of mountains in the near distance. The plains between seem endless and devoid of either human or natural life, but the general impression is one of glorious expanses, of pellucid skies and clean air, giving a sense of freedom from all restraint.

When we enter a Persian town through one of its numerous and inevitable gates, usually with tall archways covered with many-coloured faience tiles, we are once more back among our fellow creatures in the centre of life and animation. The majority of the houses are squat and uninteresting, but here and there is an imposing palace or a mosque. Persia is rich in handsome mosques of modern date; but it is the ruins of ancient mosques which fill even those who have no knowledge of archaeology or of architecture with greater wonder and admiration.

Attached to every large house is a garden, and perhaps the greatest charm of modern Persia lies in her gardens, which are all laid out formally and follow much the same pattern. The Persian's love



A Persian cart, between Kermānshāh and Hamadān. The road is under snow



A Persian city-gate (at Qazvīn) showing the typical geometrical designs in coloured tiles



of his garden amounts almost to worship as the spring arrives. Although the Persians are capable of admiring natural scenery on a large scale I believe that they enjoy the miniature landscape of a garden more than the wide expanses. What they love in their garden is its formality and the season of flowers. A Persian garden is indeed one of the most charming prospects in the world. The key-note is the central artificial pool (*hauz*) which varies in size according to the dimensions of the garden. This is built of strong masonry and has a pavement border running all round it. It never has any subsidiary structure such as a fountain or a rockery. Small runnels bordered by rock-plants flow in at different points. The pavements are sometimes beautifully tiled, and the whole is fairy-like and gives the impression of a delicate lace pattern. Outside the border are planted flowers in profusion, and beyond them the trees, the finest and most effective being the delicate plane trees, which give the finishing touch to the graceful formality of the whole. The approach to the garden usually takes the form of a long avenue of tall and tapering poplar trees. The whole garden abounds with flowers, and flowering trees such as the pear, jasmine, sycamore, and the beautiful almond and peach, which are the chief delight, and are brought out from winter quarters

and planted afresh each spring, so that they may blossom by New Year's Day to celebrate the ancient Iranian festival of Nau-rūz, or the Vernal Equinox.

The Persian bazaar is very like other bazaars in the East. Bazaars, indeed, are the most unchanging features in the so-called unchanging East, and little can be told of them that is not already well known. Those who have not visited the East cannot well realize the delight the traveller experiences from wandering through one of these covered towns with its endless streets and by-ways, and its separate quarters for the grocer, the jeweller, the carpet-merchant, and so forth, and watching copper-smiths, carpenters, and carpet-weavers all plying their trade in public view. Tehrān, being a modern town, has not a very picturesque bazaar—though it is, of course, a busy one—and it cannot be compared with the bazaars of some of the other large towns of Persia, notably that of Isfahān.

The known history of the Persians does not, of course, go back nearly so far as that of Assyria, or of Egypt, but still it goes back far enough for us to wonder that her civilization, which witnessed the fall of both these empires, should have maintained a continuity which, in spite of many external changes, has lasted down to the present day. This continuity is reflected in her art, and even, it is

claimed, in her religion, although at first sight the bas-reliefs of the Sāsānians seem to have little in common with the Persian miniatures, or Zoroastrianism with Shi'ite Islam.

No doubt the mixture of Arab and Persian blood which took place after the Muslim invasion produced a new type, unlike either the conqueror or the conquered, and no doubt the introduction or imposition of the Arabic language did much to change the outlook of the intelligentsia of the country; nevertheless, we never, in the course of our inquiries into the history of Irān, lose sight of certain typical characteristics which dominate her art and her literature: characteristics which are to be found to-day among Persians of all classes. All who have come in contact with this people have felt that the Persian is a specially gifted member of the human race. He is exceedingly quick to observe and to learn, and this quickness displays itself at a very early age. His mental activities, however, incline to carry him into the fields of philosophic speculation rather than into the dull activities of practical life. He has perfect manners and loves conversation for its own sake. He has a stock of apposite quotations from the poets and a rich fund of anecdote. He has a sense of humour and delights in persiflage. He is a fatalist with no sense of time or danger. He enjoys comfort but

ignores discomfort. The Persians will travel under the most disagreeable and painful conditions without a word of complaint. In their treatment of their fellow creatures and of animals they presuppose the same indifference to discomfort. They are immensely kind to their servants, whom they always address as *bacha* or 'children'. Persians have a keen sense of honour, and a natural distaste for signing contracts, for they like their word to be trusted. It amuses them to delay in coming to decisions or in taking action in business.

A peculiar feature of the Persian character is a reluctance, connected with a belief in the Evil Eye, to express either surprise or admiration. Our European habit of giving vent to our feelings of admiration in regard to other people's possessions is, in Persia, apt to lead to embarrassing situations: for example, if one says to a Persian, 'What a lovely horse that is!' or 'What a beautiful carpet!' the almost inevitable reply is '*Māl-i-shumā'st*'—'It is yours'. And if he wishes you to take him literally, you receive the horse or the carpet and then proceed to procure some gift which may suitably be given in exchange.

The dress of the upper-class Persians became Europeanized long ago, and now the picturesque costumes of the peasants are beginning to disappear. Men of all classes, excepting the *mujtahids*



A street scene at Isfahān





or clergy, are now expected to dress in European lounge suits, and are all, young and old, compelled by law to wear the Pahlavi cap, which is an ordinary pill-box hat about six inches high with a small flat peak. These caps are all of the same model, but they may vary in colour. The women of the upper classes have adopted European dress, but they still wear the black *chādar*, somewhat like a domino, when they go out. In the large towns many women wear the *piché* or peak, which shades the eyes without covering the face, but at the approach of a stranger they draw up the *chādar* over the lower part of the face.

## II

### *PERSIAN HISTORY*

PERSIAN history falls naturally into two distinct periods: the pre-Islamic and the Islamic, the dividing point being the overthrow of the Sāsānians by the Arabs in the third decade of the seventh century of our era. These two periods occupy each 1,290 years: from Cyrus to the Arab conquest, 550 B. C. to A. D. 641; and from the Arab conquest to the present day, A. D. 1930. The Persians themselves always speak of their country as Irān, an ethnic name implying the habitat of the Iranians—a branch of the Indo-European family. The term Persia is derived from the name of the south-westerly province of Pārs (modern Fārs), where the first kings of United Irān, the Achaemenids, had their capitals Pasargadae and Persepolis (Pārsa).

As far as we know, the earliest Iranians to settle in what we now call Persia were the Medes who, migrating from the region of Transoxania or Turkestan, established themselves in the country lying between Rhages and Ekbatana in the northwest, probably in the eighth century B. C. Of the early Medes we know very little beyond what may be learnt from the Greek historians and occasional allusions in Assyrian inscriptions—for the Medes

had frequent intercourse with their neighbours the Assyrians, from whom they acquired the art of writing, and much else besides. Their splendid capital Ekbatana, on the site occupied by Hama-dān to-day, is described with much detail by Polybius, and is referred to in the cuneiform inscriptions. No dated monument of the Median period has, however, yet been found, though we possess examples of Median art. Now that the new Archaeological Law has been passed by the *Majlis* (November 1930) we may look for astonishing discoveries by scientific excavators, though their work has been made doubly difficult by local treasure hunters with Government permits.

The earliest prophet of the old religion of Irān known to us was Spitama Zarathushtra, whom we speak of as Zoroaster, who lived in the sixth century B. C. during the reigns of Cyrus, Cambyses, and Darius I. The religion he preached was an attempt to account for the co-existence of good and evil. Creation was thus divided between two spirits, Ahuramazda the Good, and Ahriman the Evil spirit, representing beneficent light and destructive darkness. Life is regarded as a continual struggle between these two powers. Light is represented by fire and the sun, but fire plays a more important part. The Zoroastrians have been called fire-worshippers and sun-worshippers,

but, though they do not actually worship either, the former name may be more fittingly applied to them on account of their tradition of a fire lit in a remote age which has never been extinguished. Muslim historians alleged that among the phenomena witnessed at the birth of the Prophet Muhammad was the sudden extinction of the Sacred Fire of the Zoroastrians. The most peculiar feature, perhaps, of the Zoroastrian religion is the manner in which they dispose of their dead. To bury a body would defile the pure earth, which is one of the gifts of Ahuramazda, and to burn it would defile his symbol, the Sacred Fire. Bodies are therefore exposed on towers (*dakhma*) specially constructed for the purpose, to be devoured by birds of prey. The priests of Zoroastrianism were known as the Magi; in Persian literature they are called Mobed or Mugh. Their sacred books are contained in the Avesta, and are written in the most ancient form of the Iranian languages which has been preserved to us, and which some consider to have been the language of the Medes. In later times commentaries came to be written in Pahlavi.

About the beginning of the seventh century B. C. another group of Iranians, also coming from the region of Turkestan, had settled in the country south of Media which was known as Parsua, and from this place-name they derived the ethnic

Pārsa and in turn gave this name to the province known to-day as Fārs, which was formerly called Anshan. The name of their first chief was Hakh-amanish, a name the Greek historians changed into Achaemenes. The first king of this Achaemenian dynasty was Theispes, who apparently led his people into Anshan, a district of the old kingdom of Elam which had been destroyed by Assurbanipal, King of Assyria, in 645 B.C. Chapter 49 of Jeremiah in the Bible probably refers to this event. The Achaemenids were for some time tributaries to the Medians, who were superior to them in civilization. Cyrus II, who came to the throne of Pārs in 559 B.C., was determined to put an end to this state of affairs which had long been distasteful to the Persians, and after several years of open revolt and warfare he in 550 B.C. utterly defeated the Median king Astyages. By uniting these two Iranian states he laid the foundations of modern Irān. The fall of the Median Empire and this new confederacy of the Iranians under one strong ruler filled the neighbouring kings of Lydia and Babylon with alarm, and an offensive and defensive alliance was concluded between them. This coalition would certainly have sufficed to keep Cyrus in check, but Croesus the king of Lydia was proud and impatient, and having interpreted his oracles to suit

his own wishes, he set out alone to attack the Persians, but was ultimately obliged to withdraw to his capital Sardis, which surrendered after a siege of fourteen days in 546 B. C. Cyrus did not, as some have related, put Croesus to death; on the contrary he treated him with much consideration and gave him the Median city of Barene to dwell in and govern. From 545 to 539 B. C. Cyrus was occupied with wars against the Scythians on the eastern frontier. In 538 B. C. the Persian troops crossed the borders of Chaldea, where, owing to the unpopularity of King Nabonidus, they were welcomed by the inhabitants. In a battle near the Tigris the Persians gained a signal victory and Babylon fell without offering any resistance.

The kingdom Cyrus founded had no less than four capitals: namely Pasargadae, Babylon, Susa, and Ekbatana. Cyrus it was who first inspired the inhabitants of Persia with that spirit of national unity which through all the subsequent adversities of foreign conquest and alien rule the people of Irān have never lost. One of the most familiar events in the reign of Cyrus is the termination of the Jewish exile: a Zionist movement of which only a relatively small number of the Jews took advantage. The exact figures are given in the Bible (Ezra ii. 64).

Cyrus died in 529 B. C.—according to Xenophon

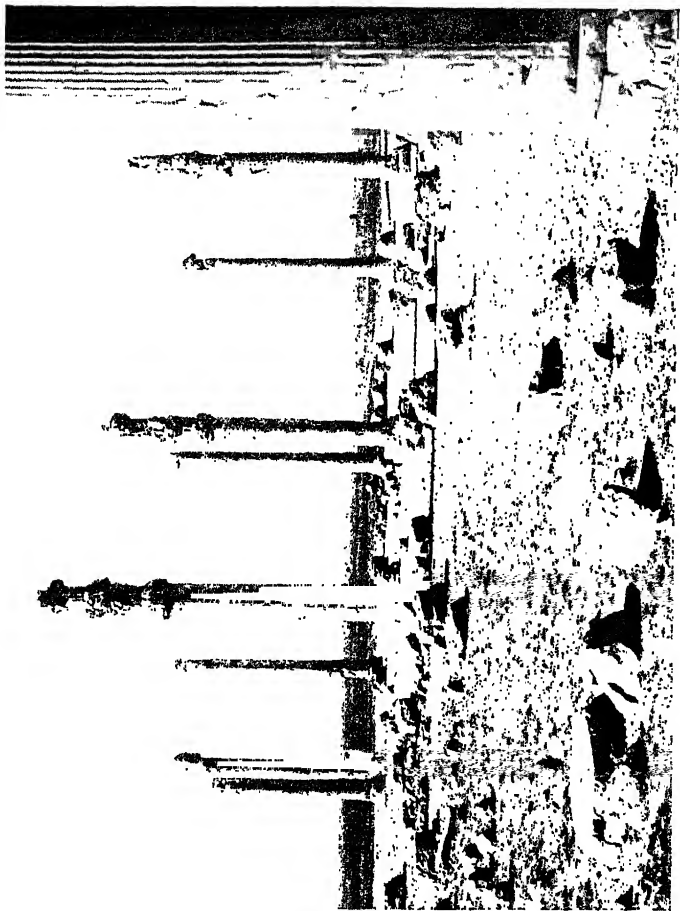
he was killed in battle against the Masagetae Scythians—and his body was brought to Pasargadae, where his tomb stands to-day. He was succeeded by his son Cambyzes, who devoted the greater part of his short reign to the conquest of Egypt, which he added to the Achaemenid Empire. It is important to realize that for nearly two hundred years the land of the Pharaohs was part of the Persian Empire. Cambyzes also conquered Ethiopia. Before setting out for Egypt he was inspired by political jealousy to cause the secret murder of his younger brother Smerdis, who was to be left behind as regent, and the later years of his reign were troubled by the rising of a pseudo-Smerdis, whose pretensions he could only deny by proclaiming the truth. The manner of his death in 522 B.C. is variously given by the historians: Herodotus says that when he lay dying from the effects of an accidental wound he confessed his crime to his generals. The ruins of Persepolis reflect the conquest of Egypt by Cambyzes just as they reflect the conquest of Babylon by Cyrus. The sculptures contain representations of men of negroid type with woolly hair and thick lips who must be Ethiopian or Kushite captives.

Cambyzes was succeeded by Darius I, the son of Hydaspes, the collateral of Cyrus. Hydaspes had during the reigns of Cyrus and Cambyzes been



governor of Parthava, which included Zarang (Drangiana), the modern Seistan. Darius, whose deeds are recorded on the rocks of Behistūn (or Bisutūn), was during the greater part of his thirty-five years' reign occupied in quelling revolts, and in consolidating and extending the conquests of his predecessors. One of his main objects was to dispose of the menace of the Turanians, or Scythians, in the north-east, who were always a source of anxiety to the rulers of Persia. It was generally while Persian kings were engaged in attacking or meeting foes from the more civilized West that they were obliged to cross Persia and repel nomadic invasions from the north-east. Cyrus, as we have seen, perished in an encounter with the Scythians, and when we come to more modern times we find the great King Abbās in the sixteenth century making peace with the Turks of Constantinople in order to devote his attention to the rebellious Uzbek Turks on his eastern frontier. It was with a view to attacking the Scythians from the north that Darius crossed the Bosphorus in 512 B. C., but although he subjugated Thrace and crossed the Danube he was unable to meet the main forces of the Scythian nomads who were roaming round the shores of the Black Sea, and retired after losing a tenth of his army.

The subject countries enumerated in the Behis-



The ruins of Persepolis



tūn inscriptions are as follows: Media, Susiana (Elam), Parthia, Haraiva (Herat), Bactria, Sughd, Khwarazm, Drangiana, Arachosia, Thattagush (? Punjab), India (Sind), Egypt, Armenia, Capadocia, Sparda, the Ionians, the 'Sacae across the sea', Skudra, the 'crown-wearing' Ionians, the Putiya, the Kushiya, the Machiya, the Karkas. These dominions he divided into twenty provinces, of which Pārs was one. Each was ruled over by a Satrap, which is the Greek form of the Persian word *khshatrapa*. It was in order to punish the Athenians for having sent assistance to certain cities in Asia Minor which had revolted that Darius initiated his attacks on Greece by land and by sea, which in 490 B.C. culminated in the disastrous battle of Marathon, where Miltiades defeated the flower of the Persian army. Darius died five years later, and it was left to his successor Xerxes (Ahasuerus of the Bible) to continue the war against Greece. The stories of the disasters which befel the Persians at Salamis and Plataea belong rather to Grecian than Persian history, and are too well known to need inclusion here. This also applies to the story of another Cyrus, who, as governor of Asia Minor, planned with the help of thirteen thousand Greek mercenaries to defeat and depose his brother Artaxerxes II. In an engagement with his brother's army on the Euphrates

Cyrus fell: and this led to the famous retreat of the Ten Thousand Greeks led by Xenophon, the same man who has given so vivid a description of this episode in his *Anabasis*: with the soul-stirring cry of 'Thalassa! Thalassa!' rending the air when at length these weary wanderers caught sight of the Black Sea (402 B.C.).

In Artaxerxes III, who came to the throne in 339 B.C., the old spirit of the Achaemenids seemed to be reborn, and he re-established Persian dominion in many countries which had ceased to recognize the King of Kings, including Egypt. And now again the history of the Achaemenids becomes rather the history of Greece. We cannot do more than allude to the rise of Philip of Macedon, who in 338 B.C. defeated the confederate Greek states, which had appealed to the Persian king for aid in their struggle for democracy; or to the triumphant progress of his son Alexander, who in 334 B.C. crossed the Hellespont and in the course of three years administered defeat after defeat on the armies of Darius, made himself master of Egypt, Syria, and Mesopotamia, and captured and looted Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis. Part of this last city he burnt to the ground, and the wonder is that so much of the great terrace still stands to-day to bear witness to its former glories. Darius III had not waited for the attack

on Persepolis, which was nobly defended by its governor, but fled to the interior, where he was captured and stabbed by one of his own Satraps (331 B.C.). In 323 B.C. Alexander returned to Babylon, where shortly afterwards he died of malaria.

The history of Persia during the next five hundred years is concerned with the rule of two dynasties, namely (1) that of the Seleucids or successors of Alexander, 323 B.C. to 140 B.C.; and (2) that of the Parthian Arsacids, 256 B.C. to A.D. 226. Alexander left no heir, and in the struggle which took place among his generals for power most of the Asiatic provinces fell to a certain Seleucus, who had married a Persian, but certain parts of Persia proper remained outside, including Northern Media, which became an independent state under one of Alexander's Persian Satraps named Atropates, whence the name Azarbaijan (Atropatene). Seleucus chose Babylonia as his head-quarters and built the town of Seleucia on the Tigris. He divided his Greco-Persian Empire into seventy-two provinces; but he devoted most of his attention to the west, neglecting Persia, and his successor Antiochus transferred the capital from Seleucia to the site of Antioch, which he founded. The natural result of this policy was the revolt of various outlying provinces, notably Bactria and

Parthia; and, mainly owing to disastrous wars with Rome, the Seleucids were unable to reassert their authority over their eastern provinces.

The province of Parthia, which lay between Media on the west and Bactria on the east, had been invaded by many nomad tribes (among them the Parni, a branch of the Scythian Dahae) who had migrated thither from the plains between the Caspian and the Oxus. Already in the year 250 B.C. we hear of these nomads revolting against the Seleucid governor of Parthia, led by a certain Arsaces and his brother Tiridates, who slew the Satrap and founded the Arsacid dynasty in Parthia (248 B.C.). In 171 B.C. the Arsacid Mithridates I came to the throne and after subduing many provinces between the Indian frontier and the Euphrates raised the Parthian kingdom to the rank of a world state. His son who succeeded him in 138 B.C. captured Babylonia from the Seleucids and established his frontiers securely against Syria. The Parthians made their capital at Ctesiphon on the left bank of the river Tigris, opposite the former Greek capital of Seleucia.

Shortly after their establishment in Western Irān the Parthians were threatened on their eastern borders by a Scythian tribe known to the Chinese by the name of Yüeh-chi, who crossed the

Oxus and invaded Bactria and Khurāsān. Two Parthian kings were killed while attempting to stay the westward progress of the Yüeh-chi, but Mithridates I (Arsaces VI), with the aid of the Greek king Eucratides, in 160 B. C., administered such a crushing defeat on the Yüeh-chi that they for the future confined their attention to Bactria; and it was one of their princes who in 30 B. C. founded the Indo-Scythian or Kushan Empire of Northern India. In the beginning of the first century B. C. the Parthians came into contact with the Romans, who had now become their neighbours. The long-drawn-out wars of the Parthians and the Romans make somewhat dull reading, although the period is one of the most thrilling in Roman history.

At the end of the Parthian period, about A. D. 220, was born Māni, the founder of the Manichaean religion. He began to preach in A. D. 242 and was barbarously executed by King Bahrām I in A. D. 274. Like the Zoroastrian religion Manichaeism is dualistic, but it is based on Christianity and other older religions, and is more spiritualistic in its conception of the parts played in creation by Light and Darkness. The tradition grew up among the Persians that Māni was a skilful painter, and had produced a wonderful picture book which, he claimed, bore witness to his supernatural power



and divine mission. In recent years very beautiful fragments of Manichaean paintings have been discovered beneath the sand-buried ruins of Central Asia.

The Parthian kings were closely allied to the neighbouring Iranians in race and in language. The fact that they did not bring about a further Iranian unification on their accession to power, but retained a kind of separate identity, was no doubt due to their adoption of many Greek institutions, including the use of Greek as the official language. This they abandoned in the first century A.D., when their attitude towards Persians underwent a great change, leading to a reaction in favour of Magianism; and it was a Parthian king who caused the first redaction of the Avesta to be made (A. D. 50). They were, however, tolerant of all religions, and many Christian sees were established in the non-Persian districts of their empire during the last hundred years of their rule. The Arsacids never at any time ruled over as much as one-half of Irān proper. The governors of Pārs had already become independent in Seleucid times and minted their own coins in Pahlavi. They were, however, later obliged to acknowledge the suzerainty of the Parthians, just as the Persians had acknowledged that of the Medians in early Achaemenid times. Throughout this period of five

hundred years the people of Pārs had retained their pride in the Achaemenid tradition, and it was this national spirit which finally made them revolt against the Parthians and prepared the way for the foundation of the Sāsānian dynasty by Ardashīr.

Before passing to the Sāsānians it may be of interest to summarize the legendary history of the periods with which we have just dealt according to Persian tradition, of which Firdausi's great Book of Kings is the best known source. This national legend only begins to run parallel with actual history at the beginning of the Sāsānian period.

The *Shāhnāma* or Book of Kings recognizes four dynasties of Persian monarchs: (1) the Pīshdādi, (2) the Kayāni, (3) the Ashkāni, and (4) the Sāsāni. The Pīshdādi and the Kayāni dynasties are purely legendary and belong to the mythology of the Avesta. The Ashkāni or Parthian Arsacid is partly historical and partly legendary. The Sāsāni is of course wholly historical, though the Persian account of its kings is wrapped in much legendary detail. While from the point of view of history these legends are without value, they are all-important for the student of Persian literature and art, for not only is the great epic of Firdausi chiefly taken up with these fabulous kings and their exploits, but the whole of Persian poetry abounds

in allusions to them, while the painters who illustrated these poems were never tired of depicting these popular legends, and thus for the understanding of much of the finest work of the great masters, like Bihzād, an acquaintance with the national traditions is essential.

As already stated, the first two dynasties are purely legendary and bear no relation to the actual history of Persia. The third, which should correspond with the five hundred years of Parthian rule, occupies only a short space of time in the *Shāhnāma*, and the whole period is more or less overshadowed by the legendary history of Alexander the Great, who is included in the list of Persian kings by being made the son, not of Philip, but of Philip's daughter and a Persian prince named Dārā, who had divorced her and sent her back to Greece, where Alexander was born; and in order to conceal these facts Philip gave out that Alexander was his own son by one of his wives. When therefore Alexander conquered Persia he was really assuming his own rightful position as heir to that throne.

The heroes whose names we encounter most frequently are the following: Gāyūmarth, the first of the Pishdādi kings, who dwelt in the mountains and waged war on demons, by whom his son Siyāmak was killed. His grandson Hūshang reigned for forty years and discovered accidentally

how to produce fire by means of flint and steel. Next came this man's son Tahumarth, who learnt writing and thirty languages from the demons. He was succeeded by his son Jamshīd, whose name is one of the most familiar in Persian legend and poetry. Jamshīd has only Solomon as a rival amongst the earliest heroes of Irān (indeed some early Arabic historians confuse their identity) and it is interesting to note that the ancient monuments of Persia to this day are called after one or other of these monarchs; thus Persepolis is called 'the Throne of Jamshīd'; the Tomb of Cyrus in Pasargadae the 'Mosque of Solomon's mother', while the hills in south-western Persia which yield such vast quantities of oil are still known as Masjid-i-Sulaiman, or the Mosque of Solomon, on account of a ruin found there, which according to Professor Herzfeld may belong to the Parthian period. Other historical monuments are called by the Persians after heroes of the purely mythical Kayāni dynasty, notably Rustam, of whom we shall speak below. In the *Shāhnāma* Jamshīd is made to reign for seven hundred years, not over men only, but also over demons, fairies, and birds. It was he who instituted the Nau-rūz or New Year's Day festival, which is still celebrated all over Persia at the Vernal Equinox. Jamshīd is finally overthrown and slain by the fiendish Dahāk,

who has growing from his shoulders two snakes which have to be fed daily with human brains. Not till he had reigned one thousand years, demanding daily victims for his snakes, did his subjects rise in revolt under the leadership of a blacksmith named Kāva, whose leather apron became the standard of liberty. Dahāk was defeated and a young man named Ferīdūn, claiming descent from the Kayāni kings, was set up as king in his place.

The legend of the three sons of Ferīdūn and their fratricidal quarrels is emblematic of the constantly recurring wars between the Iranians and the Turanians. The great legendary leader of the Turanians was Afrāsiyāb. We are next introduced to a number of heroes from Eastern Persia, of whom the most famous were Sām, Zāl, Rustam, and Suhrāb. With the death of Rustam we reach the end of the purely mythical episodes of the *Shāhnāma* and enter the realm of history with the foundation of the Sāsānian Empire by Ardashīr Bābagān.

Among the Persians employed by the Parthians as soldiers and governors at the beginning of the third century was a certain Ardashīr. There is some confusion with regard to his parentage; but he himself was known as Ardashīr Bābagān, while the dynasty he founded was called the Sāsānian.

In any case he claimed descent from the Achæmenids, and one of the rare secular books and the only history which has come down to us in the Pahlavi language is devoted to his origin, life, and deeds. How he eloped with the favourite wife of his master, King Ardawān, the last of the Parthians, forms one of the most vivid episodes in Firdausi's *Book of Kings*. In A.D. 212 he made himself master of Southern Persia, and having defeated Ardawān in battle in A.D. 226 he occupied the capital of Ctesiphon and assumed the title of King of Kings of the Iranians. He at once summoned a general council of the Magi, and re-established Zoroastrianism as the State religion. Of the old Iranian Empire, Armenia alone withstood the usurper. The Sāsānian dynasty thus founded endured for four hundred years, and among its kings are some of the great heroes of Persian history and romance. Persia herself was once more ruled by her own people and enjoyed great prosperity, thanks to the good government established by the early rulers. Their history, however, is taken up by almost continual warfare in one quarter or another. Only for short periods, after the conclusion of the numerous 'eternal' or 'fifty years' peaces, which were never of long duration, did hostilities cease between the Roman emperors and Persia. The chief bone of contention was

Armenia, which changed hands a hundred times, much to the discomfort of the Armenians, who, in the time of the Emperor Constantine, were converted to Christianity by St. Gregory the Illuminator.

Asia Minor was also the scene of constant struggle for mastery. On the eastern frontier the Sāsānids were constantly engaged in repelling the Ephthalites, or White Huns, who made their first appearance on the Persian frontier during this period. Only a few of the most notable emperors of this line can be mentioned here. The reign of Shāpūr I, the son of Ardashīr, must be referred to, if only because he was attacked in Persia by the aged Emperor Valerian, who crossed the Euphrates only to be defeated and captured near Edessa. The name of Valerian is still given to the beautiful bridge which crosses the river at Shushter. Valerian was carried off and for several years held prisoner by the Persian monarch, and the legend runs that his skill as an engineer was utilized in the construction of this bridge. It was Shāpūr II who ravaged the Roman possessions in Mesopotamia, and would certainly have pursued his conquests farther had not he been called away to his eastern frontier by the threat of barbarian invasion.

King Bahrām, who came to the throne in 420,



The Emperor Valerian kneeling before Shāpūr I: a rock-carving  
at Naqsh-e-Rustam





is one of the great national heroes of Persia, for apart from his successful rule, which lasted eighteen years, he distinguished himself so greatly in the hunting field that he received the nickname of *Gur*, or the 'Wild Ass'. His memory is preserved in a well-known verse of the *Rubaiyyat*. By a treaty which he concluded with Rome in 422 he was forced to grant complete religious freedom to Christians in Persia, for at this time the Church of Rome extended its authority over all the Christians of Asia. It was not till sixty years later that the Christians of Persia adopted the Nestorian heresy under their own patriarch, and thus renounced finally the support of Rome.

In the middle of the fifth century the Ephthalites or White Huns coming from Chinese Turkestan invaded the Oxus country. These nomads were a menace to the eastern frontier of Persia, and in 502 Qubād I was compelled to make a treaty with his enemies of Rome in order to repel the invasion of the Ephthalites. It was during the reign of Qubād I that a new heresy was preached by Mazdak, the chief Magus. Mazdak taught most advanced Communism, but as the only accounts we have of his doctrines are those of his enemies we know little of the details. At any rate he desired to distribute the superfluous wealth of the rich among the poor. Qubād was at first inclined to

favour Mazdak, but was saved from doing so by his eldest son Khusrau, who was permitted to bring about the most cold-blooded massacre of all who had become followers of Mazdak. The story is a gruesome one. The prince is said to have invited all Mazdak's followers to a great banquet. As they arrived they were cut down by the guards and buried head foremost with their feet protruding above the ground. When Mazdak himself arrived the prince invited him to go and see the product of his garden, and then put him to death.

This same Khusrau, who came to the throne on the death of his father in 531, was not only one of the best and ablest of the Sāsānian kings, but also perhaps the most popular of the heroes in Persian history. He took the name of Anūshīrvān, to which was always added the epithet of 'The Just'. It was during his reign that the Prophet Muhammad was born (A.D. 572). From the point of view of literary history one of the most important events in the reign of Anūshīrvān was the arrival at his court of a number of neo-Platonists who, when Justinian in 529 closed the School of Athens, were led thither in the hope of finding in the person of 'The Just King' a patron after their own hearts. Although it does not appear that they mixed very happily with the bigoted Zoroastrians, their residence in Persia, which extended over

twenty years, cannot have been without its influence on the intelligentsia of the court, and may possibly account for many of the neo-Platonic ideas which later found their way into the writings of the Sufis.

It was during this reign that the Turks first appeared in Persian history. These Turks, following the route taken by successive groups of nomads in the past, now found themselves on the heels of the Ephthalites. Anūshīrvān adopted the wise policy of joining with and helping the Turks against their common enemy, the Ephthalites, who were driven farther south towards India. In this connexion we learn that the Turkish Kaghan sent a letter in Chinese written on silk to Anūshīrvān to which the latter replied in a letter in Pahlavi written on paper. He then concluded a peace with the Turks, whereby he regained the lost province of Bactria, and established the course of the Oxus as frontier-line between the Allies. In 570 the excuse was given to Anūshīrvān to invade the Yaman, or Southern Arabia. Ostensibly he went in response to an appeal from the Arabs for help against the Abyssinians, who had been encouraged to invade that country by Justinian. It is important to remember that when, after the death of the Prophet Muhammad in 632, the Arabs first attacked the Persians, Southern

Arabia formed part of the Persian Empire. The conquests of Anūshīrvān extended from the Black Sea in the north to Southern Arabia in the south, and to the Oxus in the east. He was a great patron of letters and caused books to be brought from India and translated into Pahlavi. The most famous of these was the book known as *Kalīla and Dimna*, containing the fables of Bidpai. Although the Pahlavi version has never been discovered, an Arabic translation of it was made in the ninth century, and this version was responsible for the spread of these fables throughout the West. Chess was also introduced from India during his reign. Almost as famous as himself was his great Minister Buzurjmihr.

At the beginning of the seventh century the Byzantine and Persian Emperors, Heraclius and Khusrau II Parvīz, were both engaged in ambitious campaigns. The former invaded Persia with a huge army, while the latter captured Jerusalem (614) and for ten years was master of Egypt (619-29). With the aid of the Avars he laid siege to Constantinople (626). Heraclius, who died in 641, reigned long enough to see Jerusalem and Egypt succumb first to the Persians and then to the Arabs. The constant hostilities between these empires had led to no lasting result, and when the Arabs issued from their deserts to attack their

neighbours on the north and on the east, they had only to contend with enemies exhausted by long-drawn warfare, and utterly unfit to withstand the onrush of these wild enthusiasts, to whom the loot of Byzantium and Persia held out inducements far stronger, at that stage, than the reward of a martyr's death.<sup>1</sup> Yazdijerd III, the last of the Sāsānian line, perished ignobly on the north-east borders of his empire after the fall of Ctcsiphon in 636 and the final defeat of the Persian forces at Nihāvand in 641.

The invasion of Persia by the Arabs differed in many ways from all previous invasions of that country from the West. The former invaders had been represented by standing armies of trained troops under experienced generals, taking orders from the head of the state, who, on occasion, also accompanied the expedition. This at least was true of the Greeks and the Romans. The Arabs more closely resembled the nomad tribes which were constantly invading Persia from the north-east, but not hitherto in sufficient numbers to

<sup>1</sup> It has been taken for granted that the reader is acquainted with the story of the rise of Islam—how Muhammad preached the new monotheistic religion which was revealed to him by the angel Gabriel in messages which in their collected form became known as the 'Qur'ān', or the Reading.

effect anything approaching conquest of the country. It was not till five centuries later that the Turks succeeded in overrunning Persia and making themselves the rulers of that country. The Arabs were as primitive in their methods of warfare and almost as destitute of culture as the Eastern nomads. They belonged to no recognized state, and they had no tradition behind them. They had, however, what neither the civilized invaders nor the nomads possessed, namely a slogan. Although it was no doubt the hope of booty hitherto undreamed of that inspired the rank and file of the Muslim army in their early and astonishing victories over the Roman and Persian trained forces, the desire to carry the religion of the Prophet into other nations certainly possessed the leaders, who had been the trusted companions of Muhammad during his lifetime. We must not, however, picture these Arab hordes as possessing the crusaders' spirit, for, in the first place, Muhammad had given no instructions for propaganda outside Arabia, and, secondly, we do not find any attempt at wholesale conversion of the people whose country the Arabs occupied. It is true all were invited to become Muslims, and thereby to enjoy certain privileges, but force was seldom resorted to, and Christians, Jews, and Zoroastrians were all at liberty to practise their

own religions, on payment of a prescribed poll-tax. It was not till Islam began to split up into factions—and this was not long in coming about—that propaganda began.

With the battle of Nihāvand in 641 the Arabs became virtual masters of the Sāsānian Empire. But they had no ready-made civilization or constitution which they could impose upon the conquered people. When the Caliphs, or successors of the Prophet, leaving Medina, began to administer the conquered countries with Damascus as their headquarters, they found themselves obliged to call in to aid them in administration 'Romans', Syrians, and Persians. They did, however, achieve in Persia what no other conqueror had attempted, for they introduced into that country a totally new religion, which, in spite of the tolerance above referred to, quickly gained to its side the vast majority of the population; and thus, outwardly, the whole life and habits of the country were changed for the first time in a thousand years.

After the Umayyad Caliphs had ruled for eighty years with Damascus as their capital, in 750 a new line of Caliphs arose, who in 763 founded Baghdad and made it their seat of government. These Caliphs, who are known as the Abbāsids, after Abbās, the uncle of the



Prophet Muhammad, were greatly indebted to the Persians for their rise to power. The site of their new capital, on the Tigris not far from the old Parthian and Sāsānian capital Ctesiphon, was of course in Persian territory. The court of Baghdad now assumed an Iranian character, for apart from the wholesale employment of Persian officials, which had already been found expedient at Damascus, we find Persians holding the highest positions in the state, and even in matter of dress the Persian fashions prevailed. It must be remembered that the Empire of the Caliphs now extended from Spain to the Oxus. We are here only concerned with Persia, and our attention must be chiefly occupied with the great north-eastern province of Khurāsān, which was bordered by the Oxus and included such important towns as Herāt, Merv, and Nishāpūr. It was in this district that the first great national movement took place at the end of the ninth century, which led to the establishment of the first independent dynasty in Persia since the Arab invasion, namely that of the Sāmānids. The rise of this house was preceded by the short-lived dynasties, if they deserve the name, of (1) the Tāhirids, who were semi-independent governors of Khurāsān, and (2) the Saffārids (or Copper-smiths), represented by two brothers who raised a revolt in Seistan and

carried their forces up to the gates of Baghdad in A. D. 879. The Sāmānids made themselves independent of the Caliphs in all but name. They lived alternately in Bukhārā or Samarqand, and their rule of ninety years witnessed the birth of modern Persian literature.

Already in the eighth century we hear of Turks from Central Asia being employed as soldiers, and the town of Sāmarrā, near Baghdad, of which the ruins have yielded such important stores of artistic remains in recent years, was built by the Caliph Mu'tasim to house his Turkish bodyguard, who had made themselves unpopular in the capital. The Sāmānid rulers went farther than this and appointed Turks to the governorships of outlying provinces. At the end of the tenth century one of these Turkish governors named Sabuktegin had made himself so powerful in Ghazna—in the heart of modern Afghanistan—that when his Sāmānid master was attacked on the east by invading Turkish nomads he was obliged to appeal to Sabuktegin for aid, and the ultimate outcome was the downfall of the last Sāmānid, and the division of the Sāmānid territory between Sabuktegin and the Turkish invaders.

Mahmūd, the son of Sabuktegin, who succeeded his father in 998, is one of the greatest heroes in the history of Islam, and also one of the greatest

patrons of Persian literature. He attracted to his court of Ghazna (from which he ruled over more than half of Persia, owing only nominal obedience to the Caliph of Baghdad) all the leading Persian poets and other men of letters of his day, including the great Firdausi, the author of the *Shāhnāma*, or Book of Kings. Great rivalry existed among these poets as to which should deserve the title of king of the poets, or poet laureate, a title we now first hear of in Islam. Perhaps the most famous story in Persian literature is that of Firdausi and the shabby treatment he received at the hands of Sultan Mahmūd. He had long been engaged under the Sāmānids in writing an epic on the kings of Persia, and the Sultan had promised him a gold piece for every verse it contained. When at last this enormous work, twice the length of the *Odyssey* and *Iliad* put together, was produced, the Sultan paid in silver instead of in gold pieces. Firdausi left Ghazna in disgust, and proceeded to his native town of Tūs in Khurāsān, having composed on his way a most bitter satire on Sultan Mahmūd, which has since been included in most copies of the *Shāhnāma*. The story goes that Sultan Mahmūd, stung to the quick, repented of his meanness and dispatched messengers with 60,000 dinars' worth of indigo, and these messengers entered one gate of Tūs as Firdausi's body was

being taken to the cemetery by another gate. The importance of Firdausi's work for the history of Persian literature and art cannot be over-estimated. It is he who has preserved the legendary story of the early kings and heroes of Irān, of which almost all other records have perished, and it was he who inspired the early miniaturists to illustrate these legends. Among the most beautiful works of art preserved to us to-day are the richly illuminated copies of the *Shāhnāma*, for artists were never tired of making new pictures of its familiar episodes.

While the Sāmānids and Ghaznavids were ruling over the eastern provinces of Islam, the position of the Baghdad Caliphs, to whom, as has been shown, they gave only lip service, was going from bad to worse, for they had become mere puppets in the hands of a powerful Persian family, the Buwaihids, who kept them prisoners in the capital and practically divided up what still remained of Persia to the Caliphs among members of their own family. The western possessions of the Arabs had already passed out of the hands of the Caliphs of Baghdad. Spain was ruled by its own Moorish dynasty, and Egypt had set up rival Caliphs. From this point the story of Persia is really the history of various Turkish dynasties. Ever since the days of Cyrus, Turks or Tartars or Scythians coming from Central Asia were continually

threatening the eastern borders of Persia. Up till the eleventh century these nomads had been compelled, like the Ephthalites, to turn south after reaching the Oxus. In the middle of the eleventh century, however, a powerful group of Turkish nomads began to cross into Khurāsān in large numbers, and it only required a man of outstanding genius to form these nomads into a coherent army and invade the tottering empire of the Caliphs of Baghdad. Such a man at last appeared in the first quarter of the eleventh century in the person of Toghrul Beg, who, after having driven the Ghaznavids out of Khurāsān, marched through Persia and entered Baghdad in 1055. Although Toghrul was now master of the whole of Persia, he thought fit to uphold the dignity of the Caliph as representing a culture and civilization of which he himself and his wild hordes were totally innocent. He therefore reinstated the Caliph in Baghdad and withdrew himself to distant Rayy in the north, which he made his capital. The dynasty which he founded took the name of his grandfather Seljuk, and he and his successors eventually founded the empire which extended from the shores of the Bosphorus to the borders of Chinese Turkestan. The main Seljuk empire endured for nearly a hundred years, after which local Seljuk dynasties ruled over separate

provinces of Persia and Asia Minor. The period of the great Seljuks was one of the most important in the history of Persian culture, for these rough Turks, who were probably illiterate, and spoke only Turkish, had the good sense to employ the best brains in Persia to administer their vast empire, and at the same time encouraged all forms of art and literature. Owing to the devastations of the Mongols in the thirteenth century, little of their art survives in all its manifestations, but fortunately some of the most important works of literature have survived, both in prose and in verse.

There is one Seljuk king and a Persian minister who served him whose names are familiar to most readers of English, namely King Melik Shāh and his great minister Nizām-ul-Mulk, for they are mentioned in Fitzgerald's famous introduction to his translation of the *Rubaiyyat*, where we have all read the story of the three school friends, Nizām-ul-Mulk, Omar Khayyām, and Hasan-i-Sabbāh, the Old Man of the Mountain, and founder of the band of the Assassins, who agreed each to help the other if need were in after-life. The story is probably a posthumous invention, as the respective ages of the three heroes do not admit of their having all been at school together. What is, however, quite certain, is that Hasan-i-Sabbāh caused Nizām-ul-Mulk to be murdered.

From the middle of the twelfth century to the beginning of the thirteenth century Eastern Persia was ruled over by the Khvārazmshāhs, whose founder had been Governor of Khorezmia (Khiva) in Seljuk times. It was the last king of this dynasty who had the temerity to treat with contempt the great Chingiz Khān, who had sent him quite friendly messages after his capture of Peking in 1215. Chingiz Khān had spent the previous twenty years in forming, by force of persuasion or of arms, a confederation of the Mongolian tribes, and having conquered Northern China he was turning his eyes westward. No doubt nothing could have put a check on the progress of this amazing leader of men, but the maltreatment of ambassadors sent by him to this Muslim king certainly hastened his westward march. By 1220 Chingiz Khān had made himself master of all Chinese Turkestan, the Oxus country, and the country between the Oxus and the Indus. He himself did not travel beyond the Oxus in a westerly direction, but his Mongols continued their unchecked march into Northern Persia, where they destroyed many towns, including the ancient city of Rayy, which has ever since remained a heap of ruins.

Hulagu Khān, the grandson of Chingiz Khān, was appointed in 1256 to rule over Persia, and his

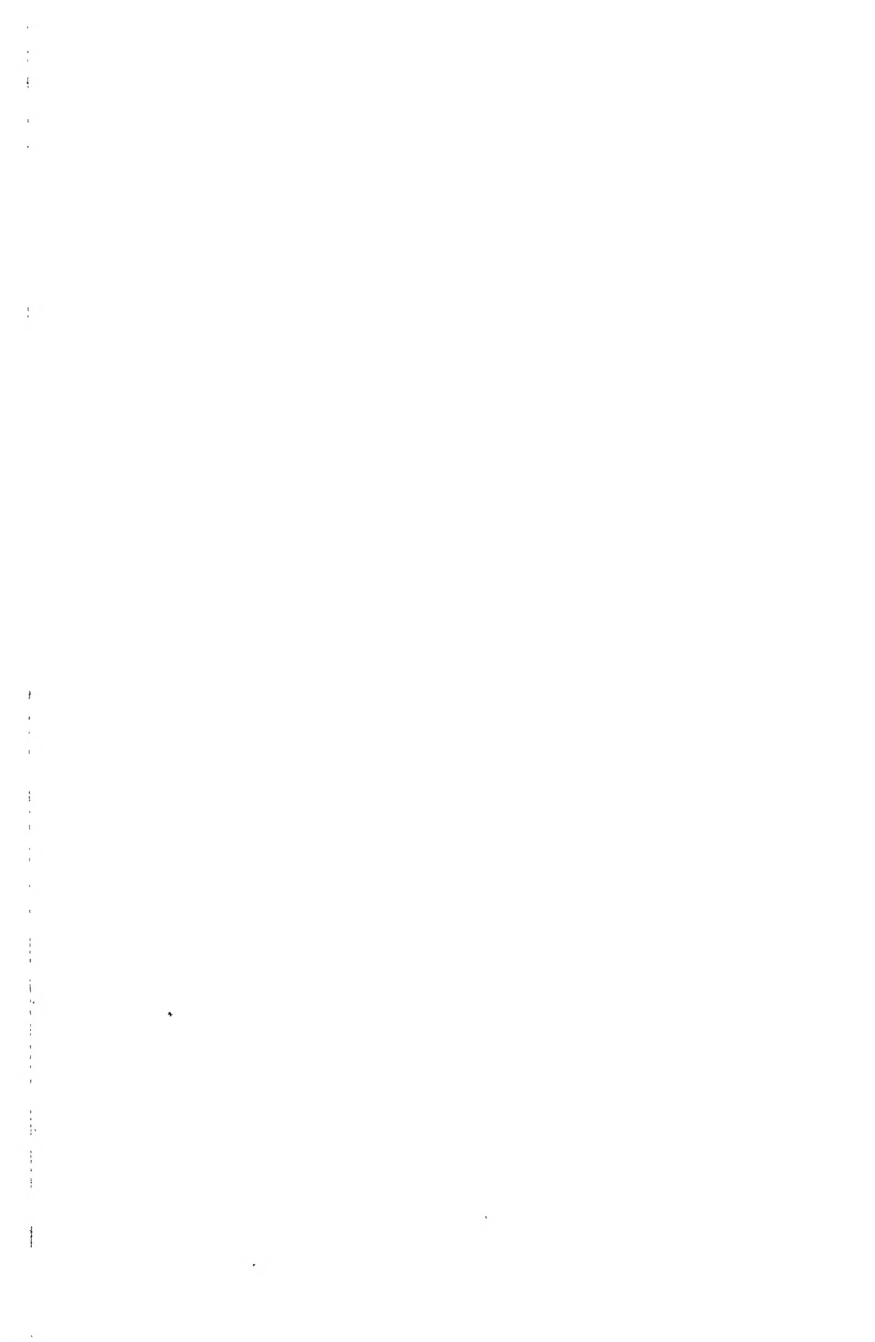


The rock of Ālamūt on which are the ruins of the Assassins' stronghold



On the Amul-Tehrān caravan route near Pulur





first task was the destruction of the fortresses of the Assassins at Ālamūt and elsewhere; having accomplished this, he marched through Persia, and in 1258 made a shambles and a dust-heap of Baghdad, and put to death the last of the Abbāsīd Caliphs. Hulagu and his successors ruled over Persia under the name of Il-Khāns for about eighty years, when their rule came to an end. The Il-Khāns made some amends for the destruction wrought by their ancestors in raising many beautiful buildings throughout their kingdom. Ghāzān Khān (1295-1304), Uljaitu (1304-16), and Sultan Abu Sa'īd (1316-35) were all great patrons of the arts. Between the death of Abu Sa'īd and the arrival of the great Tamerlane (Timur-i-Leng, the Lame Timur) Persia was divided among a number of petty dynasties; notably the Jalāirs, the Muzafarids, the Sarbadārids, the Karts, and the Turkomans of the Black Sheep and of the White Sheep (Qara-Quyunlu and Aq-Quyunlu).

In 1380 Tamerlane, who had made himself master of Transoxania, began a long series of successful campaigns in Persia and founded an Empire which he ruled from Samarqand, a town which he himself did so much to embellish with buildings which may still be seen to-day. Sultan Husain Mīrzā Baiqara, King of Herāt (died A. D. 1506), who was the patron of the artists of the

finest period of miniaturists, including the great Bihzād, was Tamerlane's great-great-grandson. Mir Ali Shīr Nawā'i, who was one of the great patrons of letters in Muslim history and himself a distinguished poet—both in Persian and in Turkish—flourished at the court of Sultan Husain. To Tamerlane and his immediate successors may be ascribed some of the finest works of later Persian architecture which have survived. The gorgeous buildings of Samarqand which, though damaged, still retain much of their amazing freshness, and the tomb of Tamerlane attributed to architects from Isfahān, with its perfect melon dome still intact, bear witness to the highest degree of taste and technique.

Though Tamerlane carried his armies on many occasions through Persia between 1384 and 1393, and though his descendants ruled over a portion of that country during the fifteenth century, he cannot be included among the absolute monarchs of Persia, which since the decay of the power of the Il-Khāns early in the fourteenth century had been divided among a number of princes and governors who were more or less independent rulers. We must pass by these petty dynasties and proceed at once to the revival of Persian nationalism under the greatest dynasty Persia had had since the Sāsānian, namely that of the Safavids.

It will be remembered that practically all the kings who had ruled over Persia since the rise of Mahmūd of Ghazna were of Turkish origin. The Safavids, although they claimed descent from the family of the Prophet of Arabia, were essentially Persian in nationality and in spirit, and it was they who first made Shi'ism the state religion which it has remained ever since. As briefly stated as possible, the belief of the Shi'as as distinguished from that of the Sunnis—the name by which all other Muslims are known—is as follows: they hold that the rightful successor of Muhammad was his son-in-law and cousin Ali, and that not only the three Caliphs who were chosen to succeed the Prophet before the turn of Ali came, but all the subsequent Caliphs were usurpers and unorthodox. The office should, they hold, have descended by right to the family of Ali. They recognize twelve of these Imāms, as they are called, the last of whom is said to have disappeared into the ground to appear again in his own time. All pious Persians believe in a hidden Imām, though some hold that it was the seventh and not the twelfth who disappeared. It will be seen that this represents a Messianic doctrine.

Shāh Ismai'il, the great founder of the Safavid dynasty, was descended from a famous saint of Ardabil. While quite a boy he gathered round

him a large following, and in 1502 defeated the most powerful of the Turkoman rulers in Western Persia. Making Tabriz his capital he proceeded to conquer the whole of Persia, so that within a short time his dominions stretched from the Oxus to the Persian Gulf, and from Afghanistan to the Euphrates. The Safavids ruled over Persia down to the middle of the eighteenth century. Perhaps the most famous of all their monarchs was Shah Abbās I, who reigned from 1587 to 1629. He was in some ways the greatest king who ever ruled over Persia, and under his fostering care arts and letters flourished as they have perhaps never flourished before or since. It was during his reign that England was first brought into close contact with Persia, and it was in 1599 that he received a large party of Englishmen in his capital of Qazvin, conducted by Sir Antony Sherley, who was in the following year sent by the Shāh to Europe as ambassador for Persia. He left behind him his brother Robert, who, after serving in the Shāh's army for several years, was in his turn sent as ambassador to England.

In 1722 part of Persia was lost as a result of a rising of the Afghans, who seized Herāt, Meshed, and Isfahān, and in 1736, taking advantage of the weak state of Persia, the Afshār Turk Nādir Shāh deposed the infant Abbās III, the last of the

Safavids, and made himself master of the whole country, even pushing his conquests as far as Delhi. The loot taken from India by Nādir Shāh included the famous peacock throne, which he brought to Tehrān. During his reign of eleven years the Persian Empire extended from the Indus to the Caucasus. His son Shāh Rukh reigned from 1748 to 1796, but his rule was actually confined to Khurāsān, while the rest of Persia was contended for by several rivals of whom the most powerful were the Persian Zands, who were in 1779 defeated by Aghā Muhammad, who founded the Qājār dynasty, which lasted down to the time of the Great War. Under the Qājārs Tehrān became the capital, which it has remained ever since. Aghā Muhammad abdicated in favour of his nephew Fath Ali Shāh in 1798, who reigned till 1834.

One of the most famous monarchs of this dynasty was Nāsir-ud-Dīn (1848-96) whose two visits to Europe, which he recorded in the most entertaining diaries, made him famous outside Persia in his own day. It was during Nāsir-ud-Dīn's reign that the sect of the Bābis created much disturbance in Persia and were severely repressed. No work on Persia could be regarded as complete without some mention of the Bābis and the Bahāis. In the middle of the nineteenth century Persia witnessed the birth of a new religion. This religion is unique

in that its beginnings were recorded by several eyewitnesses, and thus we know as much of Mīrzā Muhammad 'Alī, called the Bāb (or Gate), as we do, say, of Martin Luther. The Bāb believed he had been entrusted with a divine mission to his co-religionists. He taught a new dispensation of Islam and directed violent attacks against the corrupt clergy, and quickly gained a very large following. He began to preach in 1845, and in 1850, at the instigation of the clergy, he was executed. The fortitude he then displayed led to a further increase in the number of those who professed the new religion, as did also the ruthless persecution to which they were subjected. In August 1852 an attempt was made on the life of Shāh Nāsir-ud-Dīn, for which the Bābis were held responsible and for which they were tortured and martyred in the most brutal fashion. Henceforward the religion could only be practised in the utmost secrecy, and in 1864 all professed Bābis were expelled from Persia. The recognized successor to the Bāb, named Abdul-Bahā, began in 1866 to preach a revised Bābism, declaring that the Bāb had only been his precursor. He gained over nearly all the Bābis to his new doctrine, and they now called themselves Bahā'is. The Bahā claimed to bear a message not merely to the Muslims but to all humanity, and discarded all

those doctrines by which the Bāb had retained his association with Islam. Acre became the head-quarters of the Bahā'is, and the grandson of the Bahā, the present head of the community, still resides there. Bahāism for long could only be practised in secret in Persia, but under the present régime the Bahā'is enjoy perfect freedom. The Bahāi community includes many Americans and a certain number of English.

In 1857 Nāsir-ud-Dīn was prevented from carrying out an expedition against Herāt by the English, who landed troops in the Persian Gulf. Peace was concluded in 1858. Hereafter followed the great competition for influence in Persia between Russia and England. Towards 1890 a secret revolutionary movement against the Shah was set on foot and in 1896 he was murdered. His son Muzaffar-ud-Dīn was obliged in 1906 to call together a meeting of the leading men in order to form a *Majlis* or Parliament, which was duly opened, only to be suspended by his son Muhammad Ali Shāh shortly after his succession in 1908. As a result of this high-handed action the Shāh was obliged to abdicate in favour of his little son Sultan Ahmad Shāh, who died in Paris in 1929, having resided there for eight years. His father also died in France in 1925. Under Muzaffar-ud-Dīn Persia fell more and more under



Russian influence, but after her defeat by the Japanese in 1904-5 Russia was willing to come to terms with England in regard to Persia. By the treaty of 31 August 1907 Persia was divided into spheres of influence, the sphere of England being the south-easterly portion bordering on the Persian Gulf. England's object was to put a check on the Russian southerly movement towards the sea. Between Russia in the north and England in the south was a wide neutral zone. At the beginning of the World War the Czarist troops entered Persia and would have marched through the country had not the Russian Revolution put a stop to the expedition. The Russians now withdrew and left the whole country to the British, while the Persian government remained outwardly neutral. British troops marched from India through Baluchistan to Khurāsān, while other British troops occupied a portion of north-west Persia, and even held Baku for a short time. In the beginning of 1918 England had complete possession of the whole country. An understanding was about to be ratified whereby England assumed the protectorate of Persia while guaranteeing her integrity when in August 1919 the Persian nationalists, relying on help from the Soviet, opposed the measure. The British troops were thereupon obliged to withdraw from the

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Caucasus and Northern Persia, and Persia regained complete independence. She was, however, in a pitiable state, and the situation was only saved by the timely appearance of Rizā Khān, who, rising from the ranks of the Persian army by force of character and military genius, put himself at the head of the State. Although he at first contented himself with the position of Dictator, he was at length compelled to allow himself in April 1926 to be made Shāh of Persia, a position which he has occupied for the last five years with the greatest distinction and success, under the name of Rizā Shāh Pahlavi.

### III

#### *JOURNEYS THROUGH PERSIA*

**I**T is my intention here to describe quite briefly the principal towns and ruins of Persia and, in so doing, to follow the main caravan routes—many of them now raised to the dignity of roads—from given points of departure. This method will, I believe, help the reader to understand not only the geography but also the history of the country, for the routes are few in number and all of them as old as the Persian Empire itself. I do not propose, however, to write a travellers' guide; my object is to enable the stay-at-home reader to visualize the stage setting of the drama of Persian story.

Let us imagine then that we are entering Persia from the north, and that, leaving the Caspian port of **Pahlavi** (formerly called **Enzeli**), we proceed due south as far as **Qazvīn**. We will make this our point of departure, first in a north-westerly direction towards **Tabriz**, secondly south-east towards **Tehrān**, and thirdly south-west to **Hamadān** on the main road to **Baghdad**. From **Tehrān** we will travel first due east to **Meshed** and secondly due south to **Isfahān**. From **Isfahān** we will pass through **Shīrāz** to **Bushire** on the Persian Gulf, whence we will

take ship to **Basra** and from Basra we will go by water into the heart of Khūzistān. We shall thus make eight Itineraries.

I. From **Pahlavi** to **Resht** is nowadays a motor drive of only a few hours. Not many years ago one travelled by boat across the **Murd-āb** or 'Dead Water', then up a creek to **Pir-i-Bazaar** and thence by carriage to **Resht**. This prosperous and unhealthy town is the capital of **Gīlān**, formerly the chief silk-producing province of Persia. Its only interest lies in its importance as the chief maritime outlet of the north.

The two provinces of **Gīlān** and **Māzandarān** which lie along the southern shores of the Caspian, occupying a comparatively narrow strip of country between this inland sea and the **Elburz Mountains**, differ in every respect from the rest of Persia. The contrast between the arid plains and bare mountains in the south and the thick jungles and damp marshlands of these provinces strikes the observer more forcibly when he is travelling from south to north in leaving Persia than when he is entering the country: for even after a short stay in that country one has grown so accustomed to barren ground with here and there the oasis of a town or village, that one can hardly trust one's eyes when, on coming over the last pass towards

Resht, one sees the hills covered with dense forests and the ground carpeted with violets, primroses, and the like.

Not long after leaving Resht one enters the gorges of the Sefīd Rūd or White River to which the road clings—often perilously—but on emerging from them one leaves all natural vegetation behind, and the rest of the journey to Qazvīn is dull and uninspiring.

Qazvīn is supposed to date back to Sāsānian times and to have been founded by Shāpur II. Hārūn-ar-Rashīd is said to have founded one of its mosques. It is said to have been captured by Hasan-i-Sabbāh, the chief of the notorious Assassins of Persia, and the school-mate of Omar Khayyām. The strongest of the many forts occupied by this professional regicide was at Ālamūt, about forty miles from Qazvīn. In the reign of the second Safavid king, Tahmāsp I (1524–76), Qazvīn was made the seat of government; and it was here that Tahmāsp gave asylum to the Moghul Emperor Humāyūn during his ten years of exile from India. It was here also that Anthony and Robert Sherley had their first interview with Shāh Abbās I at the end of 1598: and here in 1627 died Robert and ten days later his companion Sir Dodmore Cotton. Abbās, for strategic reasons, moved his capital to Isfahān, and Qazvīn has never again been a royal



In the jungle country a few miles south of Amul



city. The oldest ruins of Qazvīn date from Safavid times, the most notable being the Ali Qapi gateway belonging to the ruined palace of Tahmāsp. There is also a very fine mosque known as the Masjid-i-Shāh.

II. Proceeding in a westerly direction from Qazvīn we may visit the remains of the once superb mausoleum of the Mongol Sultan Uljaitu (Khudābanda) at **Sultāniya**. This town had been founded by the third king of the Il-Khānids, Arghūn Khān, and was made the seat of government by Uljaitu, after whose death in 1316 it sank into insignificance. It was sacked in 1381 by Tamerlane, who apparently spared this rare mausoleum because it was a tomb. Outside the present village is a second smaller tomb of Uljaitu, octagonal in form and surmounted by a cupola.

The town of **Zanjān** which we next come to is chiefly famous for its silver filigree work. It was one of the first strongholds of the Bābīs. Incidentally it may be mentioned that it is the last Persian-speaking town in Western Persia, for beyond it we come to the Turkish-speaking village of **Miāna**, which has attained amazing notoriety on account of its much-dreaded bug (*Argas Persica*) whose bite is considered fatal to strangers. The famous French traveller Thévenot died of it in 1667. Curzon says



that some have pooh-poohed the idea of it being dangerous and called it a hum-bug! A little to the north-west lies the village of Turkomānshāhi, where in 1828 the treaty was signed whereby Persia ceded to Russia the towns of Erivān and Nakhshēvān, and all rights on the Caspian. We next come to **Tabriz** (or **Tauris**). Under the Qājārs this city was the residence of the heir-apparent. Few cities in the world have suffered more often or more terribly from earthquakes, and this circumstance more than any other accounts for rarity of ancient buildings. It was the earthquake of 1780 in which 40,000 inhabitants are said to have perished that almost entirely destroyed the beautiful Blue Mosque built by Jahān Shāh, the last of the Qara-Quyunlu, or Black Sheep dynasty (1437-68), one of the richest gems of Persian art of the fifteenth century. The two domes have disappeared altogether, crushing all beneath them as they fell—and there only remains to-day the lovely portico, on the tiles of which flowers predominate over geometric designs. In the south-west of the city is the old Arg or Citadel, a massive polygon standing eighty feet high and flanked by round towers. It was here that the Bāb was shot in July 1850 (see p. 68).

Half-way between Miāna and Tabriz is an old bridge known as the Dukhtari Pul which

dates from Sāsānian times and bears a certain resemblance to the bridge at Shushter (see p. 99).

There remains one more city to be mentioned in this district—Ardabīl—between Tabriz and Marand. This town attained great fame and sanctity as the residence of Shaikh Safi ud-Dīn, the ancestor of Shāh Isma‘il, who founded the Safavid dynasty. In a decayed mosque are to be seen the tombs both of the Shaikh and of the great Shāh. The famous carpet in the Victoria and Albert Museum, made in Kāshān in 1539, was presented by Shah Tahmāsp to the shrine at Ardabīl.

III. Our second itinerary from Qazvīn takes us in a south-easterly direction to Tehrān, the capital of Modern Persia, a total distance of ninety-six miles. Until comparatively recent times this was the only carriage road of any length in Persia. Ambassadors and ministers coming to join their posts at Tehrān from Resht used to be met officially at Qazvīn by the royal *mihmāndār*, and having partaken of the *dastār khān* from a table groaning with fruits and sweets, they would be given the choice of continuing the journey on horseback or of proceeding in a carriage and pair. If the latter mode of conveyance were selected the finely caparisoned saddle-horses would be in close escort so as to be

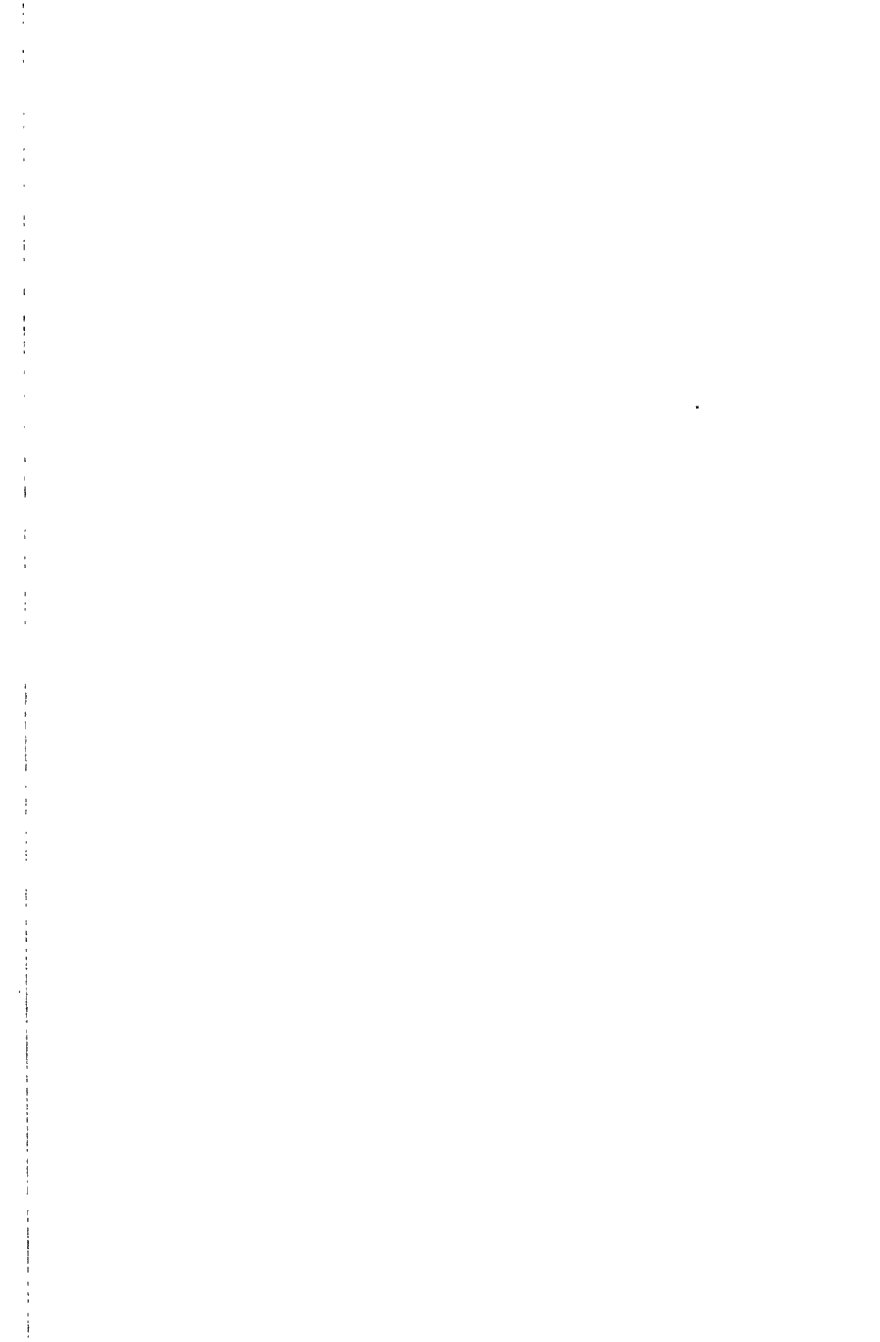
always available, should the ambassador change his mind.

It would be hard to imagine a less inspiring journey than this ninety miles of road offers, even when accomplished in a few hours by motor-car. One has the **Elburz Mountains** on the left hand to relieve the monotony, but except for the break created by the Karaj River with its dangerous-looking bridge, the landscape is utterly bare and the road itself full of bad places owing to the countless streams which flow unchecked across it from the mountains. All large towns in Persia are entered through imposing gateways—of which Tehrān has no less than twelve examples. Unfortunately the art of ornamentation has not like the architecture been content to adhere to the best Safavid models, and thus these city gates which from a distance impress the approaching traveller will shock him when he is near enough to examine the details of the faience with which they are covered.

The crowning glory of Tehrān is the giant snow-clad peak of **Demāvend** towering above the other mountains which form a sort of amphitheatre half encircling the city on the north. With Demāvend (18,600 ft.), the highest mountain in Persia, a hundred legends of ancient Irān are popularly associated, and it is even reckoned among the



Mount Demāvend with the river Lahr in the foreground



summits which claim to have supported Noah's Ark when the waters of the Flood receded. I cannot in this connexion refrain from quoting a striking passage from Curzon's *Persia* (vol. i, p. 297): 'What Fujiyama is to the Japanese, Demāvend is to the Persian landscape. Both are ever-present, aerial and superb. Both have left an enduring mark upon the legends of their country; and if the peerless Fuji has played a far greater part in the art of Nippon than has Demāvend in that of Iran, it is because the Japanese, while not inferior in ingenuity, are a vastly more imaginative people.'

Tehrān, which to-day is eleven miles in circumference, owes its present greatness to Nāsir ud-Dīn Shāh Qājār, and under the rule of Rizā Pahlavi, the present monarch, it is being rapidly improved and embellished by the construction of new wide metalled avenues (*khiyābān*) planted on either side with trees. It contains many fine public buildings of recent date, including the quarters of the Majlis or Parliament. It abounds in fine private houses and miniature palaces, each with its characteristic formal garden and lake and surrounded by high walls. It is much to be regretted that the architects of the Qājār period were so apt to forget or to ignore the great Persian traditions in their buildings. That even quite early styles are adaptable to modern conditions is well demonstrated in the very

imposing main building of the American College in Sāsānian style situated outside the walls of Tehrān. Already in the fourteenth century a famous Persian geographer, Hamdullah Mustawfi, speaks of Tehrān as a town of some importance. In 1788 Agha Muhammad, the founder of the Qājār dynasty, made Tehrān his capital, but seems to have done nothing to embellish it. The best of the imperial heirlooms are housed in a palace called Gulistān, and consist of a very rich library, neither arranged nor catalogued, which to judge by the few specimens shown to me must contain many priceless manuscripts. Near this little library is an enormous hall of audience which is furnished as a Museum. It contains, in addition to a vast collection of clocks, Sèvres vases, and so forth, amassed by Nāsir-ud-Dīn during his long reign of forty years—which included two visits to Europe mentioned above—two jewelled objects of considerable interest and immense value: one of these is a throne known as the Takht-i-Tā‘ūs, or Peacock Throne, which is claimed by most writers to be the identical throne brought by Nādir Shāh from the Dīvān-i-Khāss at Delhi. Lord Curzon was the first to point out that the description given of the Delhi throne by the French jeweller Tavernier, who saw it in 1665, does not in the least correspond with the throne of Fath Ali Shāh in Tehrān. For

example, the Delhi throne was upheld by twelve pillars, while that of Tehrān has only seven: Lord Curzon ultimately discovered on inquiry that the Tehrān throne is not Indian at all, having been constructed in Isfahān for Fath Ali Shāh on the occasion of his marriage with a young lady of Isfahān, who rejoiced in the name of Tā'ūs Khānum, or Lady Peacock. The other object is a large globe of the world made for Nāsir-ud-Dīn Shāh out of jewels. The sea is made of emeralds, England and France of diamonds, Africa of rubies, India of amethysts, and Persia of turquoises. It is said to contain 51,366 gems weighing 3,656·4 gm.

Passing to the south of Tehrān we come to the ruins of two famous cities. Part of the journey can be made by the only railway in working order in Persia, which was built in 1888 to convey pilgrims to the shrine of Shāh Abdul-Azīm (a holy man who died at the end of the ninth century). The first of these ancient cities is Rayy, a famous Muslim city built on the site of the ancient *Rhages* which existed already in the time of the Medes, and figures in the history of the Achaemenids, the Seleucids, the Parthians, and the Sāsānians. It is the Rages of Tobit (i. 14 and ix. 5). How many cities lie beneath one another under the present ruins of Rayy no excavator has hitherto had an opportunity of ascertaining. The Arabian geographer



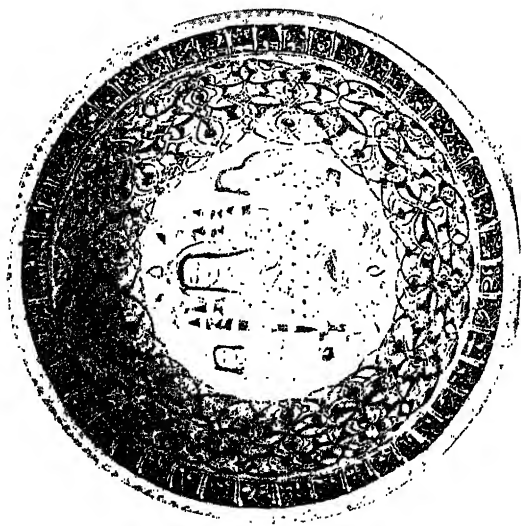
Istakhri, writing in the tenth century, describes it as the most flourishing city in the world after Baghdad. In the second half of the eleventh century the redoubtable Seljuk Toghrul Beg made it his capital, and there too he was buried. In 1221 the town was razed to the ground by the invading Mongols, and it is to the period preceding this disaster that is attributed the fine Rhages pottery of which so many specimens have fortunately been rescued. In the nineteenth century it was the fashion for visitors to Tehrān to make expeditions to Rayy, armed with picks and shovels, to hunt in the ground for such treasures. Clavijo, the Spanish ambassador to Tamerlane, who passed through it in 1404, said it was entirely uninhabited.

About thirty-five miles south-east of Tehrān lie the ruins of **Verāmīn**, the second of these ancient cities. The fine mosque, of which very extensive remains still stand, is attributed to Sultan Abu Sa'id, the son and successor of Uljaitu of the Il-Khānid (Mongol) Dynasty. There are many other remarkable ruins, but like those of Rayy they still await scientific investigation.

IV. We will now set out on our third journey from Qazvīn, taking the south-western road to **Hamadān**, which lies six thousand feet above the sea-level at the foot of Mount Elvend. Muslim



A bowl from Rhages, illustrating the story of  
Bahram Gūr and Āzāda



19th-century bowl painted in colours against  
a turquoise glaze. *Victoria and Albert Museum*



Hamadān offers little of archaeological interest beyond the tomb of the great Persian philosopher and physician Abu Ali ibn Sina, better known in Europe as Avicenna (A. D. 980-1036) and the imposing portico of a fourteenth-century mosque on which geometric designs preponderate. The great interest of Hamadān lies in the fact that it stands on the site of the ancient city of Ekbatana (the Hagmatana of the cuneiform inscriptions), which was the capital of the Empire of Cyrus. It was here that Alexander the Great accumulated such prodigious quantities of plunder. Old Ekbatana still awaits the spade of the archaeologist, though one or two precious remains have been found there, notably a very important gold plaque bearing a cuneiform inscription in three languages, which was discovered a few years ago by Professor Herzfeld. This plaque, which was made for Darius I, was found in the foundations of an ancient house, and its importance lies in the fact that it not only establishes the site of old Ekbatana but also shows that the old Assyrian-Babylonian custom of burying plaques in the foundations of important buildings was practised by the Achaemenids.

Leaving Hamadān we proceed in a south-westerly direction over the great pass of Asadābād to **Kermānshāh**, but before we reach the foot of the

pass we should remember that we are not far from the great battle-field of **Nihāvand**, where the fate of the Sāsānian Empire was sealed in A. D. 641; and having crossed the pass we must stop at two highly important spots, namely, **Behistūn** and **Tāq-i-Bustān**, before entering Kermānshāh. Behistūn (Bāghistāna, Bīsitūn), which is situated about twenty-four miles north of Kermānshāh, contains what is perhaps the most important monument in Persia. The trilingual inscriptions engraved on its rocks for the Achaemenids were destined to furnish in the middle of the nineteenth century the key to the vast cuneiform literature which had for so long baffled interpretation. The story of the transcription of these texts by Sir Henry Rawlinson is one of the most romantic in the history of archaeology, and has often been told. It must be realized that the escarpment on which the carvings were made measures 1,700 feet, and the carvings themselves were cut out of the living rock 300 feet above the ground. Scarcely less romantic is the simultaneous decipherment of the cuneiform writing by Rawlinson on the spot, by Grotefend in Germany, and by the Rev. Mr. Hinks in Ireland. To the fact that the bas-reliefs and inscriptions are 300 feet from the ground is due their wonderful state of preservation. The Tāq-i-Bustān rock-carvings lie just off the main

road to Kermānshāh, about four miles distant from that town. They consist of two deep and lofty grottoes cut into the face of the mountain and containing Sāsānian bas-reliefs. The larger grotto, which measures 30 ft. in height, 24 ft. in width, and 22 ft. in depth, dates from the time of Khusrau II (A. D. 590-629) and is attributed by legend to Farhād the hapless lover of Shīrīn. At the back of the grotto we see Khusrau between the gods Ormuzd and Anahit, and below them a splendid carving of the king on horseback, one of the finest artistic products of the period. On the side-walls of the grotto are two elaborate bas-reliefs representing hunting scenes of every description. The king and his horse are twice the size of the suite on horseback or on foot which accompanies him. Sometimes the king is shooting his arrow while standing in a boat. The game includes elephants, wild boar, stags, &c. These reliefs recall both the hunting scenes of Assurbanipal and the Persian miniature, but especially do they remind one of the famous hunting carpet at Vienna. In the spandrels on either side are winged female figures (victories), which have been the model of the early miniaturists.

**Kermānshāh** (also called Kermānshāhān) is a town of great importance with about 50,000 inhabitants. It commands roads to Tabriz, Tehrān,

Isfahān, and Baghdad. It was founded by the Sāsānian king Varahan IV, who was known as Kermān Shāh from having been formerly ruler of Kermān. On the north of the town are situated the most imposing mountain masses which assume astonishing colours in various lights. From Kermānshāh the road leads over the pass known as Pai-Tāq to **Qasr-i-Shīrīn**, where is the frontier post between Persia and Irāq. Here are some interesting ruins, including those of a Sāsānian palace after which the place is named, with vaults and domes. A few miles beyond Qasr-i-Shīrīn is Khāniqīn, whence we may proceed to Baghdad either by train or by motor road.

V. Returning to Tehrān we will set out in an easterly direction towards Meshed (Mash-had). The route lies through Semnān, Dāmaghān, Shāhrūd, Sabzavār, and Nīshāpūr. To the north lies Astrābād, the capital of the province of the same name. **Sabzavār** has had a very chequered career. It was a most important city in the time of the Seljuks, and about four miles beyond the walls of the present town on the west is a fine minaret rising to a height of 100 ft., which is known as the Minaret of Khosrugird. It is built of brickwork so arranged as to give an exterior pattern, and contains near the summit two broad

bands of Kufic writing. It was erected by Sultan Sanjar in A. D. 1110, while he was governor of Khurāsān for his father Malik Shāh. Its form is so simple that it has the appearance of a factory chimney.

We next come to **Nīshāpūr**, a city which has played a most important part in the history and literature of Persia, and few towns have been more often destroyed and rebuilt. Its legendary history includes such names as Dionysus and Alexander the Great, and Tahmuras of the Pīshdādi dynasty, while its real history is connected with Shāpur I, who is said to have given it its present name. The actual site of this city has been often changed. A former Muslim site on the south-east of the modern town is represented by a blue-domed tomb. A famous Persian traveller of the eleventh century declares that Nīshāpūr was the only rival to Cairo among great cities. Here Omar Khayyām lived and died, and his tomb is still to be seen to-day. Omar's school friend, the great vizier Nizām-ul-Mulk, built here one of those universities he established throughout the Seljūk Empire.

We will finish our wanderings in this direction at the famous and holy town of **Meshed**. Here in the eleventh century was buried the Imām Rizā, the eighth Imām, and his mausoleum, of which



the main cupola, burnished with gold, rises to a height of 67 feet, is for the Shi'as, who speak of it as the *Āsitāna* or Threshold, the greatest place of pilgrimage in Persia. The two cities of Kerbelā and Najaf in Irāq are even more sacred in their eyes: and not only do many thousands of Persians make the pilgrimage thither annually but many thousands of bodies are transported to Kerbelā for burial. A fairly common sight on the main road is a caravan of mules carrying two corpses, one on each side of the saddle cloth.

Meshed also holds the earthly remains of the great Hārūn-ar-Rashīd, which repose beneath a sarcophagus near the shrine of the Imām Rizā. Another very noticeable building is the Mosque of Gauhar Shād, the wife of Shāh Rukh the Timurid prince; it has a majestic archway covered with faience tiles, two tall minarets also tiled, and a dome larger and loftier than that of the Imām's shrine. The *Āsitāna* has a very rich library of Arabic and Persian manuscripts which was founded by Shāh Rukh and much enriched by Nādir Shāh, who for a time made Meshed his capital.

VI. Our sixth journey will also begin at Tehrān and, following a southerly direction, will lead us to Isfahān. The first town of importance that we

pass is **Qum**, which is regarded as a very holy city by the Shi'as on account of the imposing shrine of Fātima, sister of the Imām Rizā who is buried at Meshed. She is said to have died here of poison on her way to join her brother in Khurāsān. Qum was a town of considerable importance in Muslim times down to its destruction by Tamerlane; after which it lay in ruins till its revival by the Safavid kings, many of whom lie buried here. Off the main road and to the north-west of Qum lies **Sāva**, a city which once reached a high state of culture and contains some most interesting ruins, which have never been thoroughly examined.

There is a famous historical anecdote of the eleventh century connected with Qum, which offers a good example of the serious use of the pun in Muslim literature, to which reference has been made elsewhere (see p. 128). There was a certain judge who in a moment of weakness had accepted a bribe of 500 tomans. His superior, the Governor of Rayy, hearing of this, sent him a letter of dismissal couched in the briefest possible terms:

ayyuha'l-qāzī biQum  
qad azalnāka faqum.

The word 'qum' is the imperative of a verb meaning *to rise* or *start on a journey*. This pun is wittily

preserved by Professor Browne in the following translation:

Oh Qazi in Qum—

We dismiss you, so Come!

From Qum we proceed to **Kāshān**, a city which probably goes back to Sāsānid times, though local tradition associates Zobeida the wife of Hārūn-ar-Rashīd with its foundation. It has at all times been a populous and thriving centre of industry and art, and to-day is said to have 50,000 inhabitants. Here were produced in the fifteenth, sixteenth, and seventeenth centuries the finest textiles, metal-work, and ceramics. The famous Ardabil carpet was made at Kāshān (see p. 110). The beautiful coloured and glazed tiles one finds in so many buildings in Persia are called *Kāshī* work after this city. A striking feature of Kāshān is its tall leaning minaret.

From Kāshān we must strike out east from the main road to Isfahān to visit the ruins of Nāyīn, which include the remains of a mosque, the only Muslim building in Persia to which an earlier date than A. D. 1000 can be assigned.

There is, on leaving Kāshān, nothing to arrest our attention till we come to the most lovely of all Persian cities, **Isfahān**, the second capital of the great Shāh Abbās I. It is still a prosperous town, ranking with its population of 122,000 second only

to Tehrān in importance. The beauty and magnificence of its buildings have aroused the wonder and inspired the pens of a hundred travellers from the time of Queen Elizabeth. What we see to-day is the city planned and embellished by the great Safavid king who, deserting Qazvīn, made Isfahān his capital in A. D. 1600. Lord Curzon says: 'This decision arrived at, he sketched the outlines of a colossal plan. A new city, approached by superb bridges and stately avenues, furnished with public buildings as beautiful as they were large, and embellished by terraced gardens and palaces, and pavilions, sprang into existence.' The Persians have a familiar saying, *Isfahān nisf-i-jahān*, i.e. 'Isfahān is half the world'.

The centre of the city is the Maidān-i-Shāh or Royal Square. South-east of the Maidān is the Arg or Citadel, an imposing piazza reminding one of the smaller piazza of Venice. It is 560 yards in length and 174 in width.

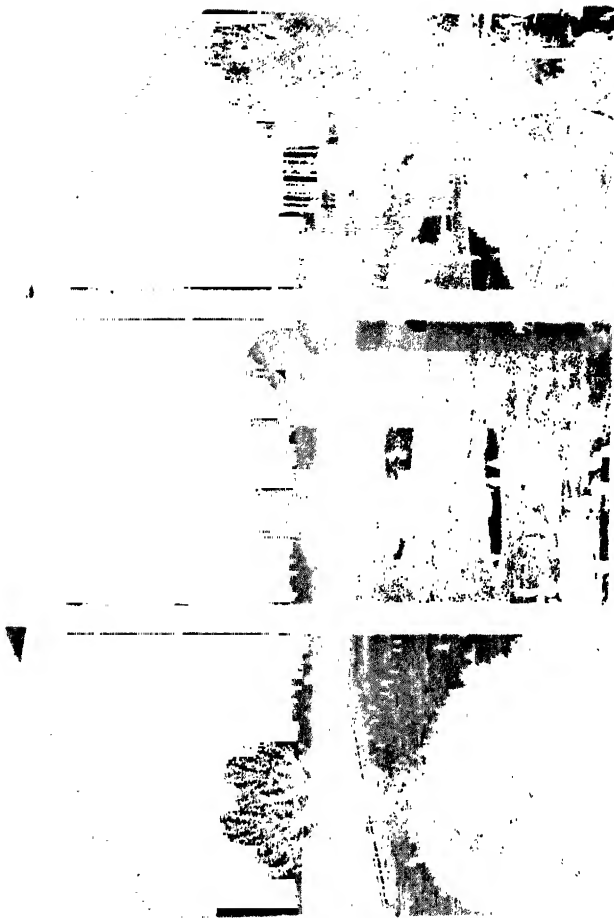
One of the finest sights in Isfahān is the great bridge of Ali Verdi Khān which crosses the river Zāyanda Rūd and is 338 yards long and 30 feet wide. It leads to the town of New Julfa, which was founded by Shāh Abbās for the Armenians, whom he removed from Julfa in Azarbaijan in 1604. Space will not allow of a description of the many beautiful mosques and other buildings

which, thanks to the comparative modernness of their erection, are still in the main intact. In the centre of the southern end of the Royal Maidān stands the Masjid-i-Shāh which was built by Shāh Abbās in 1612.

On the western side of the Maidān stands a lofty building known as the Ali Qapi, in the form of a great archway surmounted by an immense open throne-room or verandah supported by wooden columns. This type of building, which in Persian is called a *tālār*, is a sort of miniature of the palaces of Achaemenid times in Persepolis and elsewhere.

There is another *tālār* in Isfahān of larger proportions known as the Chihil Sutūn or the forty pillars, and yet another small one known as the Aina-Khāna or Hall of Mirrors. There is a still finer bridge across the Zāyanda Rūd some 300 yards below the Ali Verdi Khān bridge known as the Pul-i-Khāju.

The Masjid-i-Jum'a or Friday Mosque is the oldest Mosque in Isfahān, for it is attributed to the Caliph al-Mansūr (A. D. 755), but it has been so often restored that little is left of the original. The Madrasa, or college, of Shāh Husain is another of the beautiful buildings of this city. The word *madrasa*, it may be noted, means a place where lessons are taught. Its application is wide, for





a *madrasa* is often an infant school, a boys' school, and a college all in one. *Madrasas* were originally attached to mosques. They usually take the form of large quadrangles surrounded by buildings of one or two stories divided into a number of separate rooms opening to their full height on to the central court. Instruction is given in these rooms and even in the court itself.

VII. From Isfahān we will take the road due south to Bushirc, and in so doing we shall pass some of the most romantic and interesting spots in Persia. The first place of interest is **Yazdikhvāst**, a village perched on high rocks which rise sheer out of a deep ravine which once marked the boundary line between Persian Irāq and Fārs. The route here follows the edge of the Salt Desert, and at a place called Surmek a road branches off leading to **Yazd** and **Kermān**, the two towns in Persia which still count Zoroastrians among their inhabitants.

About fifty miles south of Surmek we come to the river Pulvār (or Murghāb) and now enter that corner of Fārs which was the birthplace of the Persian Empire. The first remains we find are those of the ancient site of **Pasargadae**, the capital of Pārs, built by Cyrus the Great (559 B. C.). The ruins of Pasargadae contain the Tomb of Cyrus,



known as the Grave of Solomon's Mother, and the ruins of a temple, and of two or more palaces.

We now enter the rocky defile through which the Pulvār flows down towards Shīrāz, till we come to the rocks called by the Persians **Naqsh-i-Rustam** (or the picture of Rustam). On the left opposite are the sculptures of **Naqsh-i-Rajab**, the ruins of the once important town of **Istakhr**, and just round the angle formed by the **Kūh-i-Rahmat** (or Hill of Mercy) appear the astounding ruins of **Persepolis**, known to the Persians as **Takht-i-Jamshīd** (or the Throne of Jamshīd). **Takht-i-Jamshīd** is the name by which the complex of Achaemenid palaces of Persepolis is most commonly known to-day. It has had various other names, as we know from Muslim chronicles, such as **Chihil (Chil) Minār** (or 'the forty pillars') or **Hazar Sutūn** ('the thousand pillars'). The Arab geographers of the ninth century call it **Mal'ab-i-Sulaimān** (or Solomon's Playground). The recurrence of the names of the Iranian king Jamshīd and of the Semitic king Solomon in connexion with Achaemenid and Sāsānian monuments all over Persia only goes to show that the Muslims had no knowledge of the early history of that country—a knowledge which was, however, possessed by the Greeks. The learned Muslims in the eighth and ninth centuries who translated so many of the philosophic and

scientific works of the Greeks into Arabic seem to have totally ignored the historians, for had they translated Herodotus they would possibly have given more suitable names to these ruined sites. According to Muslim legends Solomon resided in Syria and in Persepolis and was carried rapidly from one residence to the other by the *jinn*s.

Naqsh-i-Rustam contains the tomb of Darius I hewn on the face of the rock. The huge square building in front of this rock known as the 'Kaaba of Zoroaster' may have been a fire-altar, but the opinion of scholars differs. The same rock-face also contains many Sāsānian reliefs including one which depicts the presentation of the ring of kingship to Ardashīr by the God Ormuzd. Under the grave of Darius I is a remarkably fine relief showing the Emperor Valerian kneeling before Shapur I.

The huge terrace of Persepolis, with its tall graceful columns, was first erected by Darius I. The western side was built by Xerxes I and the eastern side by his son Artaxerxes I.

We will now continue our journey in a southerly direction till we reach Shīrāz.

Of all the place-names in Persia none sounds more romantic either to the Persians or to ourselves than **Shīrāz**, if for no other reason than that it holds the tombs of the two most famous poets of

Irān, Sa'di and Hāfiz. The people of Shīrāz are noted for their brilliant wit, and in no part of Persia does one meet men more gifted in the art of conversation and of ready quotation from the poets. The inhabitants of ancient Fārs, like those of Andalusia in Spain, are characterized by a vivacity of expression, a quickness of imagination, and facile invention of descriptive metaphors.

The stream Ruknābād of which Hāfiz so often sings is an artificial channel excavated by the Buwaihid prince, Rukn-ud-Dawlah. As the capital of Fārs, Shīrāz has always been a city of great importance and it is said to have had in the fifteenth century, with its suburbs, a circumference of twenty miles. Since that time it has passed through many vicissitudes and under the Qājārs its walls were razed to the ground. It now boasts a population of 60,000 and has the finest bazaar in Persia. Shīrāz is famous for its wines—white and red—which are sold in graceful green bottles shaped like a flattened pear. The chief beauty of Shīrāz lies in its surroundings, especially its shady gardens and purling runlets. A famous ode in which Hāfiz sums up its charms, begins:

Khushā Shīrāz u vaz' i bī misālash  
Khudāvandā nigah dār az zawālash.

Fair is Shīrāz and matchless her display  
Oh! God protect her ever from decay.

A Persian garden





Shīrāz is inevitably associated in our minds with the roses of which the poets sing and among which so many lie buried. The real rose of Shīrāz is of the hundred-leaved (*centifolia*) variety, pale pink in colour. It is more remarkable for its wonderful scent than for its beauty, but we must remember that the lovely roses we know growing in Europe are comparatively recent developments. It is worth noting that the Persian word *gul* stands not only for 'rose' but for other flowers as well.

The tomb of Sa'di is situated at the foot of the hills about one mile from the town in a north-easterly direction, and occupies a walled garden within which is a whitewashed building containing two arched recesses; beneath one of these reposes the stone sarcophagus of the poet.

The tomb of Hāfiz stands in a crowded cemetery on the outskirts of the northern suburb of the city. Whatever may have been the appearance of this tomb in earlier times it is at present quite unworthy of the great poet who there lies buried. The present sarcophagus is made of yellow marble and on it are engraved a number of quotations from the poet's odes. Lord Curzon draws a comparison between the grave of Hāfiz and that of his contemporary Dante at Ravenna.

On the road from Shīrāz to the sea, north of

Kāzarūn, is the site of the ancient city of Shāpur, which contains many Sāsānian bas-reliefs.

VIII. From Bushire we take ship to Basra, whence we will make our first and only journey in Persia by river. Basra, which is in Irāq, is one of the oldest Muslim cities, having been founded like its sister city Kūfa by the Caliph Omar about A. D. 638. Both these towns were immediately peopled with Arabs, and became great centres of Arabic learning. Basra is to-day an important harbour trading mainly with India. Since the Great War it has been connected by railway with Baghdad.

From Basra we proceed by launch along the Shatt-al-Arab, a wide waterway formed by the junction of the Tigris and Euphrates, covered on either bank with dense palm-groves. The Shatt-al-Arab flows into the Persian Gulf and on the way downstream we reach on the left bank a point at which it receives the Kārūn River a few miles below the picturesque waterside-town of Muhammara. At Muhammara we embark on a stern-wheel steamer and ascend the Kārūn as far as Ahwāz. The modern town of Abadān, the site of the headquarters and the refineries of the Anglo-Persian Oil Company, is situated on an island between the mouth of the Kārūn and the Shatt-al-Arab, which

a little lower down takes a right-angle turn. At Abadān the frontier between Irāq and Persia is situated under the water, so that the pontoon on which you land is in one state and the quay side in another.

At Ahwāz one has to break one's journey, as there the river Kārūn is blocked by a natural dam, and the journey is continued in a smaller stern-wheeler as far as Dār-ul-Khazīna at the foot of the **Bakhtiyari Mountains**, in the midst of which lie the great oil-fields, known to the English as 'Fields' and to the Persians as 'Masjid-i-Sulaimān', or the Mosque of Solomon. It is thus called after the ruins of an ancient fire-temple found there, which according to Professor Herzfeld dates from Parthian times.

From Dār-ul-Khazīna we can proceed by car to **Shushter**, which is famous for its waterworks, the chief of which are the great barrage called the **Band-i-Qaisar**, or Emperor's Dam, about 440 yards long, associated with the name of the Emperor Valerian (see p. 48), and the watermills for grinding corn. From Shushter we may travel to **Dizfūl**, the capital of Khūzistān, situated on the **Ab-i-Diz**, or River Diz, from which the town takes its name. This town contains thirty-four mosques and a long bridge which is said to date back to Sāsānian times, but to-day only the piers are ancient.



Proceeding about fifteen miles from Dizfūl to the south-west we come to **Susa** (the Shushan of the Bible) which has provided some of the greatest treasures of art found in Persia. This old Elamite city under Darius I became the metropolis of Irān and contained the king's treasure.

These brief indications of the main routes in Persia and of the towns and ruins to be met with by the traveller will, I trust, make the map of Persia more interesting to those of my readers who have not visited that country.

## IV

### PERSIAN ART

#### *Architecture.*

IT is a strange phenomenon that the spirit of destruction should so often go hand in hand with a delight in erecting new buildings. The Il-Khāns of Persia, the successors of those very Mongols who wrought such havoc among the mosques and *madrasas* of the Seljuks, were responsible for such lovely buildings as, for example, the Mosque at Sultānīya. Tamerlane, who expended vast fortunes in beautifying his beloved Samarqand, destroyed whole cities wherever he carried his victorious arms. Great conquerors so often regarded the destruction of all that had gone before as a necessary concomitant to the raising of beautiful buildings to their own glory. We do, however, hear from time to time of Eastern rulers being inspired to preserve and renovate the noble monuments of a past age, and it is worth while recalling that among the Assyrian and Babylonian kings many instances are recorded of the restoration of old temples and even of the preservation of ancient records. Among more modern rulers of Persia Nādir Shāh offers a very notable example of this spirit, for, like Hadrian in Athens, and Lord Curzon in India, he devoted much attention to

the restoration of ancient monuments, including the Shi'a shrines of Meshed, although he was so orthodox that he had contemplated the reuniting of all Islam under the Sunni flag.

It was a strange concatenation of circumstances which caused the Arabs, who had everything to learn in architecture, to destroy the glorious city of Ctesiphon only to copy later so many features of the Sāsānian style. The Caliph Mansūr (A. D. 754-75) used the ruins of this city as a quarry. He desired to use the ruins of Persepolis in the same way but was dissuaded from so doing by his vizir, Khālīd the Barmecide, who said that Persepolis had been used as a place of prayer by Ali.

Persian architecture may be divided into three main groups: the first the Achaemenid palaces; the second the Sāsānian palaces—both of these only represented to-day by ruins—and the third Muslim architecture from the seventh century onwards. Few buildings survived the invasion of the Mongols intact, and the buildings of the Mongols dating from the fourteenth century are all in ruins. It is not until we reach the period of Tamerlane and his successors that we have any examples of mosques and *madrasas* still standing and in use.

Allusions will be found elsewhere in this book

to the most famous ruins in Persia. I shall content myself here with enumerating briefly some of the principal features of these three periods. Archaeologists have been able from the remains found in Persepolis, Susa, and elsewhere to reconstruct a typical Achaemenid palace. These palaces were set on huge terraces approached by wide staircases. They were composed of a cluster of tall narrow-fluted columns covered over by beams and surrounded by four walls. They were entered by a colonnaded portico flanked by square towers. Most of the elements which went to make up these palaces were borrowed from Greek, Babylonian, and Egyptian models, but each element received a touch of originality at the hands of the Persians, and wholly original were the capitals of the columns which were composed of volutes set vertically and surmounted by the fore-parts of two bulls placed back to back. This was purely a Persian invention.

I cannot refrain from translating in this place a striking passage from Gobineau's *Histoire des Perses* (vol. ii, p. 523):

'The Iranians have no spontaneous inventiveness in matters of art. Neither under the Achaemenids, nor under the Arsacids nor later under the Sāsānians, nor even during the Muslim period, has Persia possessed a style of her own in origin, but she has understood very well how to assimilate

the Assyrian, the Indian, the Greek and the Roman tastes, and to give these elements a character which is quite individual. Herein has lain her originality.'

This is only partially true, for there is no doubt that certain architectural features were invented by the Persians both in the Achaemenid and the Sāsānian periods. Quite recently an inscription has been found in Susa in which Darius I describes in detail both the nationality of the artisans employed and the provenance of the materials utilized in the building of a new palace. The artisans included Babylonians, Medians, Lydians, Egyptians, and Greeks. Cedar-wood was brought from Lebanon, other wood from Gandhara; ivory from Ethiopia and India; stone pillars from Greece, and mural decorations from Ionia.

Of the Sāsānian period only very few monuments remain in Persia, the most important being those of Fīrūzābād (A. D. third century) and Sarvistān (A. D. fourth century). The most notable features of these buildings are the domes set over square rooms by means of squinches. Hitherto the use of domes over square structures had been restricted to adding four corners and thus forming an octagon. The Sāsānians also excelled at the building of huge porticoes, the best example of which is to be seen to this day at Ctesiphon on the Tigris.

Of the earlier Muslim period hardly anything remains even in ruins to-day. The only Muslim building which can be dated prior to A.D. 1000 is the mosque at Nāyīn which shows that the tradition of the Achaemenid palace with its flat roof supported on many columns had already been abandoned. We learn from Arab authors that it was still employed in the mosques of Baghdad (A.D. 764) and Sāmarrā (A.D. 847).

It is to the twelfth century that may be traced the development of faience-work which has ever since played such an important part in Persian architecture. The changes which came about in the building of mosques and tombs in the late Il-Khānid (Mongol) period were very possibly due to the emigration into Asia Minor and Egypt of Persian artisans and to the influence of other artisans imported by the Mongols from the East. The principal features of the post-Mongol period are the vaulted *iwāns* in the centre of the arcades flanking two sides of the court. These *iwāns* are gigantic portals or archways set in a lofty rectangular frame and embellished with colossal tiles. The two finest specimens of this period are the ruins of Verāmīn and Sultāniya. The end of Tamerlane's reign witnessed a further development of the dome which now became double and melon-shaped. As time went on

this dome became more and more squat and globular.

There is no more glorious period in the history of Muslim architecture than that of the Timurids of the fifteenth century. And never were glazed tiles and faience mosaics made in greater perfection or employed to greater advantage. The main features of this style are the huge vaulted arches, the melon-shaped domes, and the minarets, all faced with vari-coloured tiles and calligraphic ornamentation. These arches are rendered the more effective by their depth, the deep inner surfaces leading the eye back to the inner structure, whose opening is minute in comparison with the size of the archway.

Of palaces, royal residences, or any other residences, few examples remain, and our studies must be confined to the following categories of building: mosques, shrines, mausoleums and colleges, bridges and aqueducts. It is unfortunate that the domestic architecture has in recent times shown a tendency to copy European styles. It is true that the gardens have retained their old tradition, but the houses which Persian noblemen have built for themselves during the last hundred years have no Persian character about them on the outside and very little in the interior.

*Ceramics.*

In no realm of art has Persia excelled more than in the making of fine pottery. If in her technical processes she falls behind those of China, by whom, since the T'ang epoch, she has been much influenced, she has achieved in the matter of decoration and ornament a degree of excellence which has never been surpassed. The history of early Muslim ceramics in Persia cannot be traced with any certainty, for examples of this art are comparatively rare, and those we possess have for the most part been found by unknown treasure-hunters who have left no record of the place and manner of their findings. The beautiful bowls and vases from Rhages (Rayy) seldom bear any indication of their date, but some of the rare dated ones belong to the thirteenth century. There is a Rhages dish in the Eumorfopoulos Collection bearing the date A.H. 504 (A.D. 1210). It would therefore seem that the finest pottery from Rhages belongs to this century. That none of it is later is presumed from the fact that, although this city seems to have to some extent survived the ravages of the Mongols in 1220, it has certainly been nothing better than a ruin since 1300. The specimens we possess, moreover, bear paintings and designs which recall those of the book-illustrations of Mesopotamia in the thirteenth century. The



star-shaped lustre tiles which are often dated belong also to this period, while the large lustre pieces with ornamental writing in blue relief first become common in the fourteenth century. In the Timurid period Kāshān and Isfahān were the two great centres of the faience industry.

### *Carpets.*

The Persians have in all times taken delight in ornamenting objects in daily use. Their mirrors, their pottery, their penholders, and their metal vessels almost all offer a canvas for the artist. This love of pictures and of design led naturally to the amazing development of the Persian carpet. The Persians did not of course invent the carpet, for fragments of very early carpets have been found in Egypt, and all who have visited the Assyrian rooms in the British Museum will have noticed the beautiful pavements of the second millennium B. C. which are obviously reproductions in stone of fine textile work. The same is possibly true of the wonderful hunting scenes on the spandrels of the large Sāsānian grotto of Tāq-i-Bustān.

Many of the fine arts of Persia are no longer practised to-day, but the art of carpet weaving has survived and is still a thriving industry. Two kinds of carpet are recognized—the *gelīm* or woven carpet, which is made either of wool only, or



Bowl of white earthenware painted in black and pale blue, 13th century.  
*Victoria and Albert Museum*

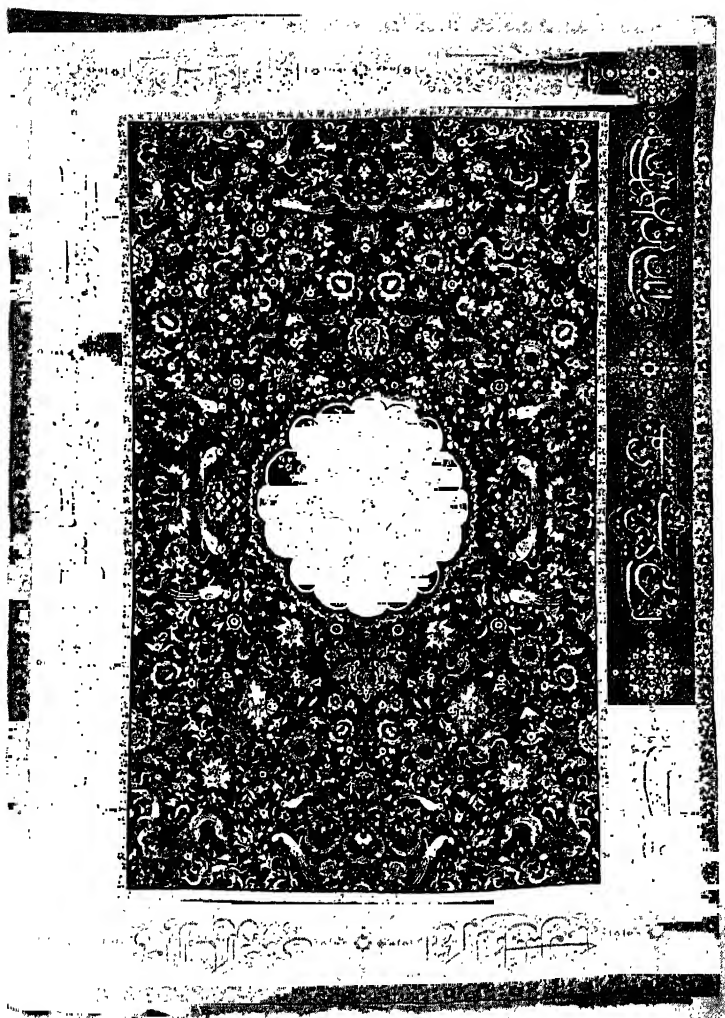


partly of wool and partly of cotton; and the *qālī* or knotted carpet, which is usually entirely of wool. The quality of the carpet depends on the quality of the material and the dyes. The best dyes are still prepared from traditional recipes, and the knowledge of the particular plants used in such dyes is confined to those engaged in this profession. Sheep's, goat's, and camel's wool are all used in the making of carpets, and, less commonly, silk. The best carpets are to-day made by the nomads, especially by the Kurds. Many cities in Persia once famous for their carpets no longer produce them: Sultānābād is now one of the busiest centres of this industry. Unfortunately, although their import is now prohibited, aniline dyes are too apt to find their way into Persia, and to be substituted for the durable vegetable dyes which are still nearly as good as they were in the sixteenth century. Dr. Rosen in his *Persien* tells us that among the people much surprise is expressed at the large sums paid by Europeans for worn-out carpets, prices for which quite a number of new carpets could be bought. They have even attempted to explain this by maintaining that the Europeans possess the secret of turning old carpets into gold! Many a beautiful old Persian carpet has been destroyed in the attempt to discover this secret.

Carpet collectors and dealers are to be found everywhere in great numbers to-day, and this has resulted in a tendency to classify carpets according to their supposed origin and date. Seeing that we know very little of the history of carpet-making even in the seventeenth century, and that very few carpets are dated, these classifications are at best somewhat conjectural; but buyers seem to derive considerable pleasure if the dealer, when pointing to a carpet, observes in a tone of deep authority, 'Isfahān, early seventeenth century'. There is, however, one famous carpet (which may be seen by any one who lives in London)—the Ardabil carpet in the Victoria and Albert Museum—into which is woven not only the place where it was made, namely, Kāshān, but also its date, 1539.

From the point of view of the student the most fruitful results have been attained by the study of the carpets represented in the paintings of the old masters, especially those of Venice and Holland. In their pictures we may find examples of carpets going back even to the thirteenth century.

The finest Persian carpets which have survived are undoubtedly the large silk variety containing animals as the characteristic feature of their decoration, and probably the finest specimen in the world is the hunting carpet formerly belonging



A Persian carpet of the 17th or 18th century, woven in wool and silver and silver-gilt thread on silk warps. *Victoria and Albert Museum*



to the Imperial House of Austria and now in the Kunstgewerbe Museum in Vienna. It is an epitome in silk of the finest miniature painting of Persia. Its variety is as astonishing as its workmanship. The general ground or foundation is pale salmon in colour, on which mounted huntsmen armed with bow, sword, or spear are seen in pursuit of lions, antelopes, wild boars, hares, and other game. Each group, though forming an individual subject, merely makes a part of the elaborate design and no two groups resemble each other, and, as if this *tour de force* were not enough, there are scattered all over the background little bunches of flowers, so carefully worked as to be distinguishable in kind. This enormous carpet has a triple border. The outermost border consists of large flowers, in the centres of which we find the suggestion of the masks of men and lions. The second border, which is three times as wide as the first, is composed mainly of groups of winged figures, reminding us in style and execution of the miniature of the period. The third border also has a floral design with masks within the flowers. Finally must be mentioned the large shield in the middle, which is purely Chinese in character. There are many other famous carpets of the same period in which various animals are represented, but human beings are seldom found.



Such carpets as these took many years to make, and it is sad to think that the great artists responsible for them should for all time remain in obscure anonymity.

The characteristic features of the carpets of the Safavid period which reached their height of excellence in the sixteenth century are animals, flowers, and ornamental designs which show a striking Chinese influence, an artistic influence which spread throughout Irān from the fourteenth century.

With the fall of the Safavids in the seventeenth century the designs become simpler, and the Mongolian influence disappears altogether. Animals also disappear, and plants become richer and fuller and more highly coloured. The carpets of Asia Minor show a further transformation and gradually natural objects are entirely replaced by arabesques and geometrical designs. These designs are for the most part meaningless as pictorial objects, but none the less they delight the eye by the arrangement of their colour and their symmetry which they have inherited from the studied natural design of the Persian carpet. In the Vienna carpet as in the contemporary miniature our artistic enjoyment comes partly from the more or less close representation of the scenes portrayed. In the later carpets, though the



Persian textile work of the period of Shāh Abbās.  
The material is velvet on cloth of gold, and the  
design represents attendants in Paradise  
*Victoria and Albert Museum*



animals and trees and flowers have become highly conventionalized, we can still distinguish between a horse and a leopard for instance, but we feel the underlying idea is the pattern, reminding us in this way somewhat of heraldry. When we come to the pattern pure and simple very little is left to suggest its possible origin. One might be permitted to compare the first type represented by the Vienna hunting carpet to a prose narrative, the second type in which natural objects are highly stylized to poetry, and the third or geometric type to music.

Persian poetry itself is apt to resemble the highly stylized Persian carpet, for a great deal of even the best Persian poetry is beautiful more on account of its design than by reason of its meaning. Much that is now purely conventional and unconvincing had once a definite meaning, and if the original figure has become almost unrecognizable the beauty of the pattern is not noticeably diminished.

Experts have given to various types of carpet distinguishing names, such as *vase* carpets, in which flowers are represented in pots; and *garden* carpets, which are divided up into regular sections representing formal gardens with trees, water, birds, and fish. During the Safavid period a special kind of carpet was produced in large

quantities for presentation to Christian princes. Many of these found their way to Poland, where they were freely copied and came to be known as Polish carpets. There is a portrait of a man by Pencz in Berlin, dated 1534, which shows a Polish carpet on a table. One of their chief characteristics is the introduction of silver thread into the ornate patterns.

The modern European carpet industry is derived from the Smyrna carpets, called Ushak, which were made for the European market.

### *Painting.*

The scientific and critical study of Muslim painting dates only from yesterday, and it is a fortunate chance that its exponents live in a time when the art of reproduction has reached so high a state of perfection. Had this not been so it would have been difficult indeed for us to follow their writings, for Persian miniatures are not, as a rule, the kind of object one can easily display in a museum, partly because most of them are book-illustrations and therefore form part of bound volumes, and partly because, owing to the fineness of their detail, they require to be examined at very close quarters.

The pictorial art of Persia, i. e. the making of pictures as distinct from ornament, has been

practised in various media, such as pottery, silver, armour, tiles, and paper. Sculpture and bas-relief are unknown in Islamic Persia, for, although the Semitic abhorrence of the human form in art broke down at an early stage in the history of Islam, it prevailed in regard to the plastic arts.

It is important to realize that, while the orthodox inhibition against the representation of living things hindered the development of painting on a large scale, and confined it within the limits of book-illustration, this same factor was responsible not only for the high technical perfection reached in the art of the miniature, but also for the development of ornamental writing and arabesque designs which are the glory of so many mosques and so many manuscripts.

A number of Arabic manuscripts containing illustrations of a primitive but lively character are preserved in the libraries of Europe. For convenience this type of painting is called Mesopotamian, but the nationality of the painters is a matter of doubt. The earliest specimens hitherto discovered only date from the beginning of the thirteenth century. The only form in which early painting in Muslim Persia has been preserved is in its ceramics, notably in the pottery which has been unearthed in recent years in Rayy (Rhages), and which goes back before A. D. 1220 when that town

was virtually destroyed by the Mongols; and in some other towns which suffered an identical fate. These ceramics offer the only link between the art of the Sāsānians of the third to the seventh centuries and the Persian miniature first known to us at the end of the fourteenth century.

It is evident that in the long intervening period of seven centuries during which we have no examples of Persian painting other than those on pottery, the Persians were not without artists. The Mesopotamian picture-books must have been well known in Persia, and we hear of a book of poems illustrated by Jamāl of Isfahān being presented to Toghrul last of the Seljuks in A.D. 1184. We also have definite proof of the survival of many traditional *motifs* which can be traced back through the early Muslim pottery to the bas-reliefs and metal-work of the Sāsānians. The late Sir Thomas Arnold was able to demonstrate with admirable clarity the survival of these *motifs* in the paintings of the Persian miniaturists of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. Not merely the subjects but even their exact treatment are so accurately preserved as to indicate that there was no break in the tradition. One is reminded of similar survivals of classical art in the painting and sculptures of the Christian Church. One of the most interesting examples of these *motifs* is found in the story of

King Bahrām and his musician slave-girl Āzāda. On old Sāsānian dishes we find represented the King mounted for the chase with the girl seated in pillion playing a harp. In the foreground is a deer with its hind leg transfixed by an arrow to its ear. The story of King Bahrām was often resung by the poets and wherever a miniaturist has illustrated this scene, the setting, except for variations in costume and the fact that the harpist sometimes has her own mount, is practically identical. The grouping is as stereotyped as that found in familiar sacred subjects by the old masters in Europe. In the case of the Christian painters, however, this clinging to convention had behind it a definite church tradition, whereas in the case of the Muslim painters the tradition was purely artistic and dated back to a time when Persia had another civilization and another religion.

The earliest miniatures that have come down to us which can with certainty be called Persian date from the end of the fourteenth century. They derive their subjects from historical or romantic texts and they show a strong Chinese or Eastern Turkish element. Here already we find indications of that enchanting richness of conventional detail and decorative grouping which culminates in the Persian miniature of the best period, and distinguishes it as something quite apart from all



other painting in the world. Both in the Timurid and Safavid eras, however, we find artists like Bihzād and Rizā Abbāsi making imaginary and real full-page portraits of simple figures without background. This style relies for its effect not so much on skilfully arranged detail and multiple coloration as on the artificial, almost affected, pose of the figures, and the restricted though often brilliant colour scheme. As a rule, however, in the *genre* pictures of the fifteenth to seventeenth centuries the buildings, trees, landscape, and sky play an equally important role with the *dramatis personae*. It is noteworthy that landscape painting as such has never been regarded by Persian painters as an all-sufficient subject for a picture, and this is the more strange in view of the fact that in many Persian miniatures it is the landscape which most attracts the eye: conventional landscapes with their 'futurist' rocks, usually of pale mauve, representing the hills; their trees as stiff and orderly as guardsmen on parade, and their wisps of white clouds *à la chinoise* floating in an azure sky. For as in their poetry so in their pictures the Persians take their chief delight in formalism and convention. It is perhaps necessary to mention here that in Persian as in Chinese painting the shadow is scrupulously ignored.

It was the Timurids who gave the first real

impetus to Persian miniature painting. During the reign of Shāh Rukh (A.D. 1405-47) Baisunqar Mīrzā founded an academy in Herat in which the arts pertaining to the making of books, especially miniature-painting and calligraphy, were studied. This academy attained its most flourishing period under Sultan Husain Baiqara (A.D. 1469-1506), the patron of the most famous of all Persian painters, Bihzād, who was born about A.D. 1440 and was still alive in A.D. 1506. At the Court of this prince were also to be found Sultan Ali of Meshed, the calligrapher, and the poets Mīr Ali, Shīr Navā'ī, and Jāmi. Later in life Bihzād accompanied Shah Isma'il, the founder of the Safavid dynasty, to Tabriz. One of his most famous contemporaries was Agha Mīrak, to whom is attributed the well-known picture of Muhammad's ascent to Heaven on horseback, which is included in the Tabriz Nizāmi (reproduced by *The Studio* with a preface by Mr. Laurence Binyon). The third great master of this period is Sultan Muhammad who lived at the Court of Shāh Tahmāsp (A.D. 1524-76). His best pupil was Ustad Muhammadi of Herat. The most famous artist in the reign of Shāh Abbās I (A.D. 1587-1629) was Agha Rizā, better known as Rizā Abbāsi, whose fame rivals that of Bihzād himself.

It is remarkable how often in the history of

a people we find not merely the decline of taste, but what is far worse, the substitution of bad for good taste. Take for example the restorations and additions to the interior decoration of the Duomo at Pisa: one would imagine that the men who were responsible for these had never had an opportunity of seeing the marvels of Italian renaissance art, instead of being men brought up in those very surroundings. In the same way the Persian art of book-illustration, instead of coming to an end or continuing merely to copy the masterpieces of the past, developed on lines which fill us with horror. The great heroic subjects of the *Shāhnāma* such as the slaying of the White Ogre by Rustam, the mortal combat in which Rustam kills his son Suhrāb, and Bahrām hunting the wild ass, which inspired the old miniaturists to produce some of their finest work, have in the lithographed editions of the *Shāhnāma* become grotesque and even childish imitations of the old models, and are totally without charm. The same bad taste is also displayed in many modern carpets—even in the finest silk ones—where one finds hideous portraits of men in modern dress, and where colour harmony plays no part at all. There was a kind of revival in the time of Fath Ali Shāh, of whom good contemporary portraits still exist. He also copied the ancient Persians in causing a huge

bas-relief of himself to be carved on the rocks at Chashma-i-Ali near Tehrān. Nāsir-ud-Dīn caused similar rock carvings to be made of himself near Amul.

I cannot believe that Persian art is dead. European scholars who have devoted themselves to Iranian studies are always sure of a warm welcome in Persia, and can attract large and interested audiences in Tehrān to lectures on Persian archaeology, history, or literature. It would be a pity if this revival of interest were to remain purely antiquarian, and it is devoutly to be hoped that the new enthusiasm for their own glorious past together with the widespread interest in the art of Persia which is now being shown in the West may lead to an artistic revival in that country.

## PERSIAN LITERATURE

THE pre-Islamic literature of Persia is composed of the Zoroastrian sacred books written in the old Avestan language which is closely allied to Sanskrit, and of the Pahlavi or Middle Persian commentaries on these books. No doubt many secular books, both historical and legendary, were composed in Pahlavi, not to mention translations from Sanskrit like the fables of *Kalīla and Dimna*, but most of these secular works have been lost, though some of them survive in Arabic translations.

The term 'first phase of Modern Persian literature' might be fittingly applied to the Arabic works in prose and verse which were written by Persians. This phase began shortly after the Arab conquest and naturally overlaps with the rise of Modern Persian literature, for not only did many authors like the famous philosopher Ghazālī and the poet Sa'di write in both languages, but down to the present day Arabic is still used for theological works. Omar wrote most of his scientific work in Arabic.

During upwards of two hundred and fifty years Persia was more or less merged into the vast Arab Empire, and although individual Persians played a great part in the administration, the country,

as a whole, was living under an alien rule. Persians were given, indeed, the option of retaining their own religion on payment of a poll-tax, but no encouragement was given to national aspirations. The Arabic tongue made a very ready appeal to intelligent Persians, whose mental qualities made them delight in the subtleties of this rich and complex language. During Sāsānian times Persian had been written exclusively, so far as we are aware, in the very cumbersome and intricate Pahlavi writing. We can imagine how the first generation of Persians who studied Arabic welcomed the highly developed alphabet which the Arabs brought with them, and it was only natural that they should apply themselves to acquiring this language and employing this script which was so greatly superior to their own. Moreover it was probably the key which unlocked the door to government employment. We may therefore suppose that Persian was still spoken throughout the length and breadth of the country by the people, and that when it was written the Persians employed the Arabic alphabet. What the Persians contributed in their turn to Arabic literature is a matter of no small wonder. As Professor Browne so well said, if we were to eliminate from Arabic literature the works of Persian authors very little would remain.

The above considerations will, I think, help us to understand better the great difference between the results of the Arab and of the Greek and Parthian invasions on the Persians, for the two latter peoples gave Persia no culture of which any trace is directly observable, and exercised practically no influence of their own. As was quite natural, when at last the language of Persia began again to be used by poets and other writers, it was full of Arabic words and expressions, and such words and expressions were not borrowed in a distorted guise, as for example are the French words borrowed by the English, but, being taken over in their written Arabic form, they were preserved in Persian unaltered.

Poetry was we know composed in Modern Persian in the ninth century, and we hear of Persian calligraphy being admired in the reign of Hārūn-ar-Rashīd. In other parts of the Empire, in Syria, Egypt, and farther west, Arabic replaced the local vernaculars, but Persian survived. Persian was regarded, a contemporary writer says, as a necessary qualification for a policeman!

The first great poet to employ Persian as a literary language was Rūdaki. The greater part of his poems have unfortunately been lost, including his poetical setting of the fables of Bidpai (*Kalīla and Dimna*). It was this poet who, by

means of a charming lyric in which he recalled the delights of Bukhārā, induced the Sāmānid King Nasr ibn Ahmad to abandon a protracted sojourn in Herat which his troops disliked, when all other forms of persuasion had failed. The king was so much moved by the poem that as soon as he heard it he jumped on his horse without waiting to put on his boots and gave the order to return homewards.

The outstanding poets, between the tenth and the sixteenth century, are, in chronological order, Rūdaki, Firdausi, Anvari, Qatrān, Omar Khayyām, Nizāmi, Khāqāni, Sa'di, Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmi, Hāfiz, and Jāmi.

The principal types of verse-forms in Persian are (1) the *rubā'iy* or quatrain; (2) the *ghazal* or ode; (3) the *qasīda* or elegy; and (4) the *mathnawī* or narrative poem in rhymed couplets. The quatrain, whether it be philosophic, didactic, or amorous, is readily understood by the Western reader because it is confined to one topic or idea and is of necessity brief.

The *ghazal* or ode, on the other hand, cannot very well be compared with an ode or a sonnet in a European language because it has always been the practice of the Persians to make every couplet express a complete idea, and to make each couplet independent of what has gone before or



what comes after. In rare odes such as the lament of Hāfiz on the death of his son there is a single idea running through the whole poem, but even here each couplet is so complete in itself that the order is immaterial, except for the convention that the first two half-couplets must rhyme together, and that the last must contain the poet's name. Otherwise what holds the ode together is the fact that it is in a particular metre and all on one rhyme at the end of each couplet.

The *qasīda* has no real counterpart in Western literature. Its name implies that it has a special object in view, that object being generally the eulogy of a rich patron in whose honour the poem is written. It may also be devoted to some occasion of rejoicing such as a marriage, or to some disaster such as an earthquake. The whole *qasīda* is in one terminal rhyme, and—unlike the ode which seldom extends beyond a dozen—may run to as many as a hundred couplets.<sup>1</sup> Whereas the *ghazal* always contains the poet's name in the last verse, the *qasīda* never mentions the poet's name, but as a rule introduces the name of the patron to whom it is addressed or dedicated.

The fourth type of verse, known as the *mathnawi*,

<sup>1</sup> C. S. Calverley made an amusing effort in this direction which gives exactly the opposite impression to that produced by the multiple rhymes in a Persian *qasīda*.

is arranged like alexandrines in rhyming couplets. Various kinds of composition are written in *mathnawī* form: (1) the epic—the whole of the *Shāh-nāma* of Firdausi is in rhyming couplets; (2) romantic poems, such as the story of Laila and Majnūn, and of Yūsuf and Zulaikha; (3) collected stories of didactic or mystic intent, such as the great *Mathnawī* of Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmi, or the *Bustān* of Sa'di.

There are other forms of poetical composition but they are not commonly met with. It will thus be observed that the range of Persian poetry is almost as circumscribed as that of her painting, and the result has been the same in both these arts: for if we compare the miniature and the ode we see that imposed limitations and conventions have led to that perfection in technique and that fine finish in form which give to the best examples the quality of exquisitely chiselled jewelry.

It is difficult to convey to the reader who is ignorant of Persian the part which *language* as such plays in Persian poetry, not only on account of its richness of vocabulary which furnishes endless synonyms for one idea, and a range of rhyming inconceivable in any European language, but also because of the feeling, hard to define, inspired in Persians by individual words and expressions. We might call this love of language 'snobisme

littéraire', for the Persian poet is expected to 'show off' his command of language and even what we call a 'bad pun' is a recognized figure in serious Persian verse.

Such then is the poetry of Persia. It must not be thought that there is no prose, though it is true that belle-lettristic prose is less common than in European literatures. There are no such things as orations or essays, though the art of epistolary style (*inshā*) has been highly cultivated. The most famous prose work in Persian is the *Gulistān* of Sa'di which is, however, partly in verse, because the author has chosen to enforce either the narrative or the moral of his stories with occasional poems. Ornate prose interspersed with verse is unfortunately also employed by otherwise serious historians, much to the dismay of the student. For example, Vassāf's important history of the Mongols is so ornate in style that one cannot see the wood for the trees. Two prose works in Persian, however, have come down to us which are distinguished by the force and simplicity of their style and by the directness of their narrative, namely, the *Chahār Maqāla* or 'Four Discourses', by Nidhāmi Arūdhi composed in A.D. 550 (A.H. 1155) which contains anecdotes regarding the officials, the poets, the astronomers, and the doctors, and (2) the *Siyāsat Nāma* or Book of Government,

written by Nizām-ul-Mulk the famous vizir of the Seljuk Melik Shāh, which is a manual of administration based partly on past history and partly on his own experiences.

When describing the fine arts we are able to refer the reader to originals in museums or to reproductions: in the case of poetry it is impossible to offer the reader so much as a reproduction, for even the most realistic translation—one in which metre and rhyme are skilfully preserved without violation of sense—cannot convey the blending of music and language which is the most essential quality of the original. The nearest approach to the original Persian known to me in any translation is offered by FitzGerald's *Rubaiyyat*: but it must be remembered that this poetic form by reason both of its brevity and of its universal appeal can be readily rendered into a foreign language. All other verse forms when translated are bound to sound strange and artificial. This is not to say that English renderings when skilfully done do not please: the contrary may be proved by the translations of Hāfiz made by Miss Gertrude Bell, to mention no others.

It can serve no purpose for me to give here a complete survey of Modern Persian literature. I shall therefore confine myself to the mention of some of the works which are most commonly found

in the best illuminated manuscripts. First and foremost comes the *Shāhnāma* or Book of Kings of Firdausi, completed in the eleventh century, which with its hundreds of heroic and romantic adventures naturally offered unbounded scope for the artist.

Next come the four romantic poems of Nizāmi, namely, (1) *Khusrau and Shīrīn*, which includes the story of Farhād the master-builder who loved Shīrīn and met so tragic an end; (2) *Laila and Majnūn*, the story of desert lovers who were kept apart by a family feud and only found their union in death; (3) the *Haft Paikar*, or 'Seven Effigies', which contains famous stories of King Bahrām Gur, including the one of the slave-girl Āzāda who accompanied him on his hunting expeditions, which was such a favourite subject among Persian artists even in Sāsānian days (see p. 117); and (4) the *Book of Alexander*, being the legendary tales of Alexander the Great. Nizāmi also wrote a poem of semi-ethical contents called the *Treasure-house of Secrets* (*Makhzan-ul-asrār*), and for this reason his complete works are known as the *Khamasa* or Quintet. Nizāmi, who died at the beginning of the thirteenth century, is regarded as the undisputed master of the romantic epic, just as Hāfiz is undisputed master of the lyric. Next to Nizāmi stands Jāmi, who flourished in the fifteenth century



Bahrām Gūr and Āzāda. From a Persian manuscript of the *Shāhnāma*, 15th century. British Museum



and was the most prolific writer of the Timurid period. He wrote several collections of *ghazals* and *gasīdas* in addition to seven *mathnawi* poems in the same style as Nizāmi's, which include the story of Yūsuf and Zulaikha, i. e. Joseph and Potiphar's wife. This subject, which had already been treated in a separate *Mathnawi* by Firdausi (of which only one copy has survived), was very popular with the miniaturists. One of the most commonly portrayed incidents is that of Joseph's admission to the presence of Zulaikha and her attendant ladies, who were so overcome by his resplendent beauty that they cut their fingers instead of the oranges they had in their hands.

At an early date the artists, especially after the Mongol invasion, took to illustrating prose works of historical contents and of these the best known are (1) the great history of Chingiz Khān and his successors written by the famous vizir-physician and historian Rashīd-ud-Dīn entitled the *Jāmi'-ut-Tawārikh*, completed in A.D. 1305, and (2) the *Zafar Nāma* or Book of Victory, the history of Tamerlane.

The *Fables of Bidpai*, in which the protagonists are generally animals acting like men, were many times adapted in prose and verse from the Arabic translation of Ibn Muqaffa and were also a favourite subject with the miniaturists.



Before leaving the subject of Modern Persian literature some reference must be made to the great mystic *Mathnawi* of Jalāl-ud-Dīn Rūmī (thirteenth century) which is known by the distinctive title of 'The Mathnawi'. This long poem, divided into six books, is one of the most remarkable works in the literature of the world. It is regarded by the Persian Mystics as their Bible. It contains a large collection of anecdotes of every description, some serious, some amusing, some even flippant, all told with the object of inculcating some moral or mystic truth. For out of Islam grew Sūfism, or Persian Mysticism, which plays so large a part in Modern Persian poetry. The Sūfis hold that God and the world are one, the world being only an emanation of the Deity. Nothing exists outside God, and the soul of man is a part of the Universal Soul. During this life the Soul is separated from its source and is remerged into it after death. We are all drops of a single ocean in which we are again to be lost. The Sūfis adopted the metaphors of the love lyric in order to express these ideas. The separation from, the yearning for, and the union with the Beloved all denote the relations of the Soul to God. One of the fundamental texts on which Sūfī practice is based is: 'God said, I was a hidden treasure and I desired to be discovered, so I created man in order that he might discover me.'

During the nineteenth century Persia produced three poets of a high order of genius: Qāāni of Shīrāz, Yaqhmā of Khurāsān, and Mīrzā Serūsh of Isfahān, all of whom in clearness of diction and elegance of style fall very little short of Hāfiz and Sa'di. In fact so great was Qāāni's command of language, and so musical his ear, that some of his poems, in my opinion, surpass in charm anything else in Persian literature. Every Persian is more or less of a poet and has a natural instinct for rhyme; perhaps no language lends itself more readily to versification. Apropos of the readiness of Persians in extempore verse, countless tales are told of men and women who composed verses, quatrains, and even *ghazals* just before their death. Many of the kings of Persia were themselves poets. Fath Ali Shāh was indeed a poet of no mean order, though his verses are very little known. He wrote under the poetic name of Khāqān. His *divān* or collected poems were lithographed in Tehrān about 1860 but copies are hard to come by. Two manuscript copies exist in the British Museum. He loved to be portrayed surrounded by his sons, ten of whom also claimed to be poets.

The actual state of popular Persian literature outside poetry cannot be called flourishing. Its latest development is in the direction of popular plays, chiefly comedies: but, though they offer

interesting specimens of modern colloquial Persian, they are merely translations from the Turkish of Trans-Caucasia, and do not, therefore, represent any literary activity in Persia.

The Persians' love of literature, and especially of poetry, is as deep and genuine to-day as at any period in their history. During a recent stay in Tehrān I had the pleasure of meeting a number of poets who enjoy a high reputation among their countrymen. Indeed the love of poetry permeates all classes. One is never surprised to hear verses from the classic poets quoted by men in the most humble situations like muleteers, shepherds, and even homeless nomads.

A taste for calligraphy has also survived, and not only do the Persians cultivate the art of letter-writing, with a view to elegance in form, but in the houses of many Persians will be found mounted specimens of the writing of famous calligraphers such as Yāqūt Muta'simi and Sultan Ali of Meshed.

The literary and historical researches of Western scholars have aroused both the pride of the Persians in their forgotten past and a desire to join forces with these scholars in their researches. Young Persians in ever-increasing numbers are now studying at the feet of European professors, and have already produced valuable contributions

to the history of their own country. Persia has, however, apart from this rising generation of scholars, produced one or two men of rare eminence in the field of critical research like Mīrzā Muhammad Khān Qazwīni and Mīrzā Sayyid Hasan Taqi-Zāda, formerly Persian Ambassador in London.





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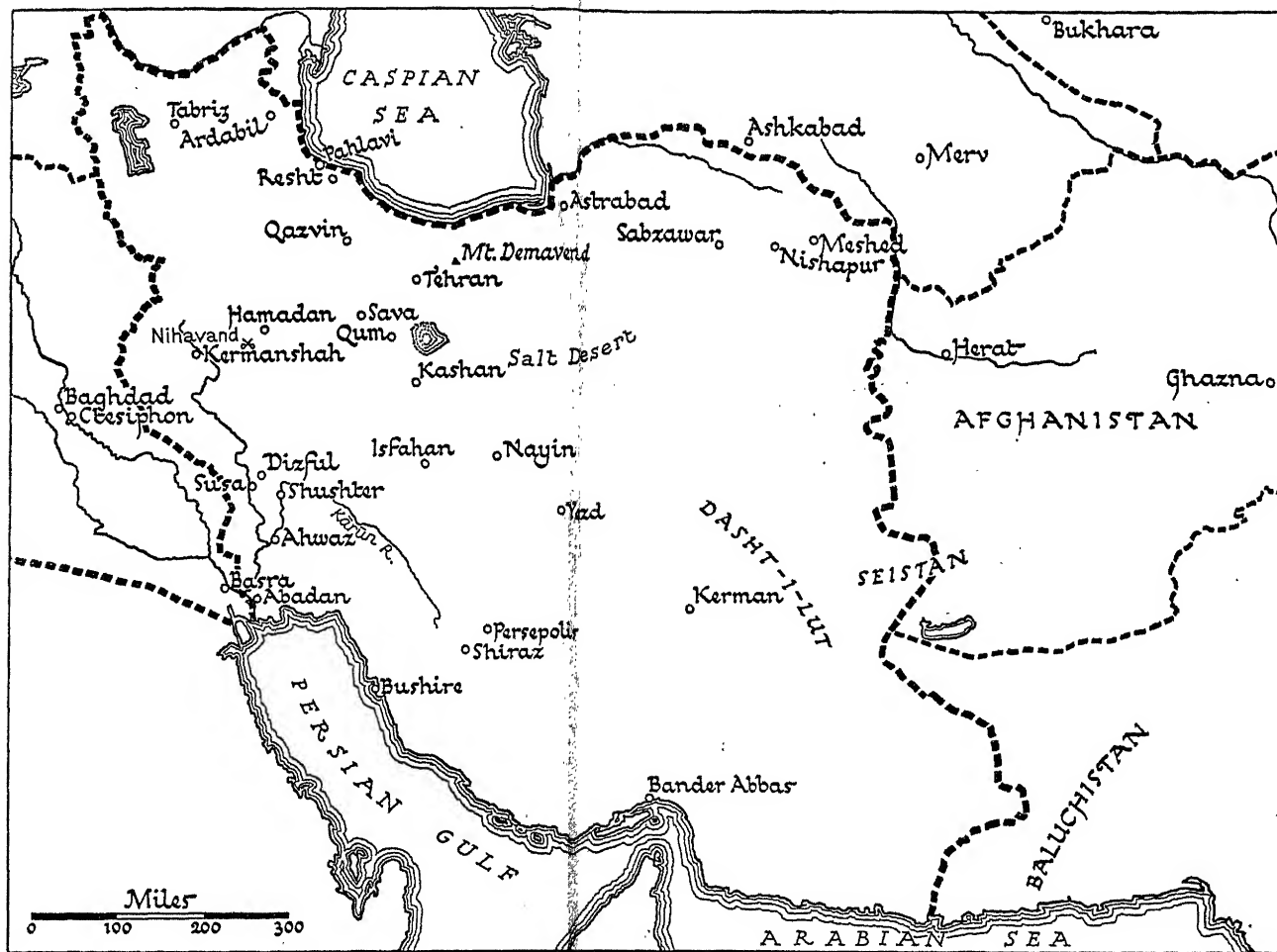
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